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The Nation.

NEW ORLEANS STRUGGLES BACK

REBECCA SOLNIT on Rebuilding
MICHAEL TISSERAND on Schools
ROBIN TEMPLETON on Prisons
MARC SIEGEL on Mental Health
and WALTER MOSLEY on Redemption

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LETTERS

PEACE MOVEMENT: DEAD OR ALIVE?

Washington, DC

■ Alexander Cockburn makes three points in "Support Their Troops?" ["Beat the Devil," July 30/Aug. 6]. One is right, one is wrong, one is preposterous. First, he says the US peace movement doesn't embrace the Iraqi resistance. Right. Second, the peace movement is "pretty much dead." Wrong. Third, publicly sympathizing with the Iraqi resistance will somehow build "the necessary critical mass to have a real movement."

Cockburn waxes nostalgic about the days of earlier antiwar movements, particularly Vietnam and Central America. I was part of the sector of the Vietnam antiwar movement whose favorite chant was "One side's right, one side's wrong. We're on the side of the Viet Cong!" In the 1980s we didn't only oppose US intervention; we also supported the FMLN and the Sandinistas. And throughout the antiapartheid years, we supported the African National Congress.

But that was then. This is now. I have spent the past seventeen years opposing US sanctions, war, invasion and the occupation of Iraq. But I never supported Saddam Hussein, who was "resisting" the United States during the sanctions years, and I don't support what is called "the Iraqi resistance" today.

What's the difference? We supported the NLF in Vietnam, the FMLN and the ANC out of principle, because we supported the social program they were fighting for. We may not have agreed with every position or tactic, but we shared what they were fighting against—US-backed dictatorships or US-paid *contras* or the devastation of apartheid—and what they were fighting for as well: independence and socialism in Vietnam, self-determination and social justice in Central America, a nonracial South Africa.

Unfortunately, that's not the case with Iraq. Certainly the Iraqi people have the right to resist an illegal occupation, including military resistance. And certainly there are Iraqi people, organizations and movements that many of us do support. (The work of US Labor Against the War in supporting the Iraqi oil workers unions is one of our best examples.) But what is broadly named "the Iraqi resistance" is a set of largely unconnected armed factions (including some who attack Iraqi civilians as much as they do occupation troops). There is no unified leadership that can speak for "the resistance"; there is no NLF or ANC or FMLN that can claim real leadership and is accountable to the Iraqi population as a whole. We know virtually nothing of what most of the factions stand for beyond opposition to the US occupation—and for myself, of the little I do know, I don't like so much.

Real internationalism means making good on our obligations to end the war and occupation and recognizing the Iraqis' international law-sanctioned right to resist. Internationalism does not require us to embrace any particular resistance forces regardless of what they stand for. We build the strongest movement by keeping our focus on the US occupation, maintaining our demand to bring all the US and "coalition" troops and mercenaries home, dismantle the US bases and give up control of Iraq's oil industry.

Cockburn is wrong when he claims the peace movement is dead. How does he think that 70 percent antiwar opinion he notes was created? There are now 300 US cities where "dead" movements have forced city councils and mayors to pass resolutions demanding that troops and the National Guard be brought home, that funds for the war and occupation be reallocated to education, infrastructure and healthcare. United for Peace and Justice is coordinating regional mobilizations for October 27, and across the country counterrecruitment work is escalating.

Our movement is very much alive. It is nowhere near as strong as we must be to force an end to the occupation. But we are alive, searching for a clearer strategy to transform antiwar public opinion into real political power, to bring that 70 percent with us to support an entirely new US foreign policy based on justice, not power.

PHYLLIS BENNIS, *director*
New Internationalism Project
Institute for Policy Studies

COCKBURN REPLIES

Petrolia, Calif.

■ Right now I don't think the peace movement is advancing the end of the Iraq War by a single day. In fact, goodly chunks of it are effectively protracting the war by marching in lockstep with the Democratic Party, whose overseers strive on an hourly basis to tamp down unseemly criticism of what the party's Congressional representatives are up to. What the peace movement has substantively done since the Democrats took over Congress is give the green light to the "surge," to continued funding for the war, to the next Pentagon budget.

Take the "netroots." The organizers of the recent Yearly Kos event wouldn't even schedule a strategy session on ending the war in Iraq: They denied John Stauber's request to include a session organized by Stauber's Center for Media and Democracy featuring speakers from Iraq Veterans Against the War. Set that wimp-out next to this paragraph from a *New York Times* news story from Des Moines, Iowa, published August 12: "Four years after the last presidential race featured early signs of war protest, particularly in the candidacy of Howard Dean, a new phase of the debate seems to be unfolding, with antiwar groups giving the Democrats latitude to take positions short of a full and immediate withdrawal. Neither MoveOn.org nor its affiliated group, Americans Against Escalation in Iraq, have sought to press Democrats here in Iowa to suggest anything short of ending the war immediately."

Phyllis Bennis talks vaguely of "searching for a clearer strategy," but this vagueness is no more surprising than the self-restraint of MoveOn and Americans Against Escalation in Iraq. Bennis resides at the Institute for Policy Studies, whose principals are well aware that any IPS-related support for a strategy deemed discomfiting to the Democratic Party's efforts to capture the White House in 2008 would result in having IPS's major funders yank them back into the kennel in short order.

I don't doubt Bennis's calendar is admirably full of speaking events, but out here in the progressive Northwest, there's nothing much going on between San Francisco and the Canadian border. Yes, there have been useful actions in Olympia and Tacoma, but it's awfully quiet. The mass mobilizations of 2003 seem light-years away. In 2005 UFPJ raised more than $1 million, and in 2006 it raised $575,000. Those budget numbers were provided at a UFPJ conference. The difference came from failure in small donations and Internet donations.

Of course there's no fizzle. People here aren't being driven crazy by the war the way we were by the slaughters and bombings of Vietnamese. The horrors pressed down on one every day. Of course people were ultras, which is where the long-march radicals should always start out. The alternative is to come out of the womb squealing about "the excesses of the left" and spend the rest of your life like Todd Gitlin writing op-eds to that effect.

It was even somewhat the same in the Central American interventions of the 1980s. You could read about *contras* disemboweling a rural organizer from the FSLN and tremble because it might be the same person you had just met on a solidarity tour, either up here or down there. People thought I was being frivolous by evoking North American lesbians traveling to meet their Nica partners, but bed is a pretty good place in which to cement revolutionary solidarity.

Actual Iraqis are mostly a blur to the peace movement. Sure, towns here pass resolutions telling the President or Congress to do this or that. Arcata, California, sixty miles north of me, got a lot of press for doing that, at least until they threw David Meserve off the City Council. It didn't add up to anything. Now, if a group

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EDITORIALS

After the Flood

The catastrophic government failure that conspired with Hurricane Katrina to devastate New Orleans two years ago will not easily be forgotten. The images were stark—families stranded on rooftops, panicked masses at the fetid Superdome, bloated bodies left adrift—and the soundbites terse, with Bush's backslapping "Heckuva job, Brownie" providing the best summary of his Administration's sense of accountability to the people of New Orleans. In the media and among the American public, the outrage—at the suffering, injustice and official incompetence—was seemingly universal. So it is difficult to understand how New Orleans could have been allowed to endure what came next.

When the Gulf Coast desperately needed a massive public works program, what it got was a stronger dose of the very same toxic neoliberal policies that laid the groundwork for the Katrina disaster. Public services were starved as critical government functions were outsourced to politically connected corporations. Because the Bush Administration refused to allow emergency funds to pay municipal workers' salaries, 3,000 were fired. Millions in taxpayer funds went to crony firms such as the funeral company Kenyon, a division of Service Corporation International (a big Bush donor), which was hired to retrieve dead bodies at $12,500 apiece. The privatized reconstruction regime was not only grossly inefficient; it cut out rank-and-file New Orleanians who actually cared whether the effort succeeded or failed. As *Nation* columnist Naomi Klein points out in her new book, *The Shock Doctrine: The Rise of Disaster Capitalism*, "Washington could easily have made it a condition of every Katrina contract that companies hire local people at decent wages to help them put their lives together. Instead, the residents of the Gulf Coast…were expected to watch as contractors created an economic boom based on easy taxpayer money and relaxed regulations." With little oversight, these contractors have exploited the most vulnerable. Undocumented immigrants, typically paid meager wages, make up a quarter of the reconstruction workforce. Meanwhile, much of the city is being rebuilt with the cheapest labor of all: prison labor.

With such a perversely skewed economic development strategy, the spiraling social crisis that followed—documented by the articles in this issue—was probably inevitable. Still, it was helped along by yet more bad policies. The public school system was drastically remade and is now a patchwork quilt of charter schools along with a small, withered state-run system. Housing remains a huge problem. When rents spiked to 45 percent above pre-Katrina levels, the government responded by slating 5,000 public housing units for demolition. As attorney Bill Quigley puts it in this issue, "Neighborhoods are breaking down because we don't have the families back. We don't have a lot of the churches. We don't have the infrastructure in poor communities that we had before." Given all this, the rise in crime that has disfigured the city was practically foreordained. With the murder rate hitting record highs, law-and-order politicians prescribed a crackdown, and arrests now stand at an average of 1,300 per week.

The solutions to these problems are almost too obvious to mention—but they all depend on the creation of a very different sort of public sector, one that works for the people, not for business elites and Washington ideologues. That does not seem to be in the cards right now. Instead, communities, aided and inspired by outside volunteers and charitable donors, are taking matters

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into their own hands. They are fighting to restore their neighborhoods, keeping in mind the delicate ecology around them. They are preparing as best they can for the next storm.

Trauma in New Orleans

A few months ago I took a tour of the physical destruction in New Orleans, but I ended up feeling more disturbed by the persistent sense of despair. Our driver and guide, Joe Gendusa, a 67-year-old native, zigzagged through the abandoned buildings, fighting off tears as he spoke. "My parents' graves were under seven feet of water," he said. "They never rebuilt the cemetery." A nurse I spoke with later, Diane Graham, who has been treating patients in New Orleans since 1978, said there are thousands of people like Gendusa in the city, many of whom have sunk into clinical depression or worse, and yet the city lacks the services to handle their psychiatric needs. "The ER is always full," she said, "and we never have the staff to take care of them."

New Orleans lost most of its mental health infrastructure in the storm, as clinics and hospitals were destroyed and healthcare professionals relocated. Pre-Katrina New Orleans had 225 working psychiatrists; according to the Orleans Parish Medical Society, there are seventeen left. Last fall the Louisiana Department of Health and Human Services received $80 million in federal aid for behavioral health. But facilities have not been rebuilt, and basic services have not been restored. Instead, a mental health crisis has taken shape.

The state's Office of Mental Health was able to serve only about 40,000 people in all of Louisiana the year before Katrina. Immediately after the storm, health officials estimated that 250,000 people needed services in areas affected by the storm—a need that has not diminished. According to researchers at Louisiana State University, there has been a dramatic increase in depression, anxiety and post-traumatic stress. The Society for Research in Child Development found that 40 percent of children who have returned to school suffer such psychological problems as sadness, clinginess, difficulty concentrating, irritability and risk-taking behavior.

Yet the city's two major hospitals, at LSU and Tulane, lost their inpatient psych units in the storm. The facility run by LSU—with more than 100 beds, it was once where police brought out-of-control detainees—was destroyed. The DePaul Tulane Behavioral Health Center had a 110-bed psych hospital that was permanently damaged. So far LSU has been able to reopen a twenty-bed emergency psych unit (only five are in use, for detox), and it's slated to open a thirty-three-bed acute adult unit. The Office of Mental Health reports that of 578 inpatient psych beds in New Orleans at the time of the storm, only 236 remain. The city's major remaining inpatient facility is the state-run New Orleans Adolescent Hospital, where Diane Graham works; its forty-five beds now must be used for adults as well as children. One community facility, the Enhanced Health Treatment Center, has reopened in New Orleans East—without a penny in federal funding. In the suburbs, Jefferson Parish takes some overflow; but regional hospitals accept few

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patients, as they are pressed to meet local needs.

Dr. Jack Finn, president of the Metropolitan Hospital Council of New Orleans, says crime is on the rise in part because "there is nothing to do with psychotic patients except to give them a prescription and put them right back out on the streets." The state has funded a few ambulatory-care clinics that provide psychiatric services, but they are not equipped for emergencies. Finn calls this "building the spokes of a wheel without the hub."

What has happened to all the federal money? Dr. Fred Cerise, Louisiana's secretary of health, says half of the $80 million is just now being distributed. The state used $55 million of these funds for mental health crisis services and $50 million from FEMA to create Louisiana Spirit, which runs a crisis hot line and provides door-to-door services. Kathryn Power, HHS's mental health director, has praised the program, but Dr. Kathleen Crapanzano, a top Louisiana government health official, said it hasn't played a significant role. This year HHS has granted Louisiana $50 million to attract healthcare workers, but many positions remain unfilled, due largely to the paucity of housing.

Two years after Hurricane Katrina, a state of psychiatric emergency persists. Federal, state and local health officials must come up with short-term interventions, including temporary facilities in the heart of the city. Concrete incentives, such as higher pay and upscale housing, should be used to attract mental health providers. Approval for hospital and clinic construction must be streamlined. In May New Orleans Mayor Ray Nagin finally wrote a letter to Governor Kathleen Blanco demanding that she "fix" the mental health crisis; Blanco responded with a list of public parties that share responsibility for the problem. She needs to be pressured to hold all of those parties accountable.

The American Psychiatric Association is hosting a conference in New Orleans in October whose theme is "RECOVERY: Patients, Families, Communities." Consciousness-raising is important, but it would be far more beneficial for the APA to pressure residency programs across the country to send in rotating doctors.

A lack of proper psychiatric care interferes with all medical services. Patients under great stress are not only difficult to manage; they also develop more physical illnesses. New Orleans's psyche has been badly damaged. Rebuilding it is one of the city's most important reconstruction projects. MARC SIEGEL, MD

Marc Siegel, MD, an associate professor of medicine at New York University School of Medicine, is the author of False Alarm: The Truth About the Epidemic of Fear.

Waiting for 'The Big One'

Wall Street did not get to the beach this August, and the guys in good suits are looking rather pale. I don't expect this financial crisis to turn into "the big one," a total unraveling that makes the history books. But nobody knows, and that's what makes it scary. In the past few weeks the magical computer programs that tell hedge funds and brokerages when to buy and sell stocks, bonds or more exotic financial instruments failed. And they took a lot of smart money right over the cliff, accompanied by some prestigious names. Bear Stearns had to shut down two imploding hedge funds. Goldman Sachs had to rustle up $3 billion to keep one of its hedge funds from collapse. Kohlberg Kravis Roberts (KKR), the notorious takeover firm that has cannibalized so many corporations, experienced similar embarrassment.

When the big boys get blindsided, it rightly scares the crap out of lesser players, who rush for the door but can't get out. First they try to dump their fishy-smelling mortgage securities, but nobody will buy them. Then they decide to raise cash by selling some of their good paper. Nobody will buy this either. For the moment, sophisticated, overconfident financiers have lost confidence because they cannot calculate the value of their own product.

It is the oldest story in financial markets, the tug-of-war between fear and greed—and once again, fear is winning. This crisis is one more flashpoint reminding us that the country's economic well-being is held hostage by the "modern" financial system, with its fallible computer models and extreme oscillations between excess and panic. Our dependence started with financial deregulation twenty-five years ago, but the dangers have grown steadily larger, still unaddressed by the political system.

Saturnino Fanlo, the chief executive who supervises KKR's embattled financial fund, made a revealing comment to the *New York Times* on August 16. Fanlo said he has been through many financial crises, and "this is the most disturbing liquidity crisis, with real impact throughout the economy if it does not rectify." How many times must we flirt with "the big one" before it finally arrives?

Our vulnerability is embedded in the new illusions created by the deregulated system. Basically, skeptical bankers overseeing loans were replaced with computer models. The abstracted market analysis knows how to crunch the numbers for the new financial instruments but is not so good at knowing the value of the underlying assets the "paper" stands for. The players who originally make the loans escape personal liability by bundling dubious mortgages into bonds and then selling them to financial markets. The downstream investors who buy these mortgage securities never see the houses or the homebuyers who borrow the money. The investors figure that if something goes wrong, they can always sell the paper to the next fool. Just in case, investors and financial firms purchase hedging "derivatives" from the banks, which supposedly protect them against risk. But derivatives are another financial time bomb. Nobody knows whether these gimmicks will actually work, especially when everyone is trying at once to collect on them. In a storm of defaulting loans, the flood of cross-claims could bring down the banking system.

The nation's greater risk is that Wall Street's gyrating hope and fear will end up poisoning the larger economy. The Fed has held credit tight for more than a year, but despite its official claims, the economy is not "robust" for ordinary people, only for capital and corporate profits. For months, the economic numbers for employment, incomes and consumption have been quite soggy. The CEO of Wal-Mart explained why his sales are down: "Many customers are running out of money at the end of the month." Did anyone in Washington hear that?

Given Wall Street's panic, business and consumers will natu-

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COMMENT

rally be more cautious about new deals, purchases and borrowing—the correct behavior for them. Unfortunately, it's the wrong medicine for the economy, which is profoundly unbalanced in old-fashioned ways: Wages and salaries have fallen steadily as a share of GDP, while corporate profits have hit a forty-year high. The Federal Reserve and its complicity with the carefree financial markets has pushed the rewards in one direction for roughly twenty-five years, and it shows. Financial wealth soared, while consumer incomes faltered and failed to sustain people's standard of living. As a national economy, we borrow to buy, both at home and abroad, and that elixir is losing its magic too.

Ben Bernanke, the new Fed chairman, may become the scapegoat for the crimes of his predecessor. Alan Greenspan favored capital over labor at every turn and was always oblivious to Wall Street excesses—except when the industry needed a bailout. This made the financial players more irresponsible, because they knew Greenspan would be there to save them [see Greider, "The One-Eyed Chairman," September 19, 2005]. This time Bernanke may have been slow to act because he wanted to avoid another bailout. If so, this was a righteous position, but lousy timing. His discount-rate reduction is not enough. The Fed needs to skip the theory and act forcefully to stimulate the real economy.

In another era, the government would have responded aggressively by providing temporary relief to failing mortgage debtors and other innocent bystanders, cutting interest rates and shoring up the financial system with easy liquidity, then maybe punishing a few Wall Street rogues to show the country that irresponsible behavior would no longer be tolerated.

Given the government we have, that kind of Keynesian response seems less likely. The Fed is now loaded down with orthodox conservatives, even a few totally frothy right-wingers. Bernanke must find the nerve to dust off the regulatory powers and turn them on Wall Street. Make bankers open up their loan windows and start handing out easy credit to troubled institutions in finance and business. The Fed can clean up the mess later.

Congress should step up too and start re-regulating the financial system. I am not even sure if Democrats still understand how to do this sort of emergency stimulus, or if they still believe in it. For me, the political uncertainty is part of the potential crisis. This is a situation where the people are not going to condemn politicians for overreacting to the risks. But people will never forget a political party that failed to act in time. WILLIAM GREIDER

CALVIN TRILLIN

ADIEU, KARL ROVE

While skirting rules that he could skirt, he
Pulled off a bunch of tricks—all dirty.
We note now that there was a time
When Rove reigned as the Prince of Slime.

The Economy Debates

ELECTION '08

Seventy-two percent of Americans think economic conditions in the country are getting worse. That's because this economy isn't working for most Americans. The wealthiest few have captured the blessings of growth, while incomes are stagnant: Despite several years of growth, they still haven't matched the peak of 2000, before the tech collapse. And most Americans aren't keeping up with the soaring cost of basics like healthcare, energy or college tuition. Now the housing bubble has burst, and millions are facing rising mortgage costs, declining housing values and a spreading credit squeeze. Nationally, we're running a huge trade deficit and are paying more in interest abroad than we earn from foreign investments. But in the presidential debates thus far, the economy seldom gets much attention. Even as the mortgage crisis staggered Wall Street, ABC moderator George Stephanopoulos seemed almost apologetic when asking about the economy in the August Democratic debate in Iowa.

The Republican presidential contenders tout the Bush economy as, in Fred Thompson's words, "the greatest story never told." Four years of growth, low unemployment and inflation, rising profits and productivity—what's not to like? This affirms the candidates' faith in the conservative scripture: lower taxes, particularly on the wealthy; free trade; deregulation; privatization. Their one quibble with George W. Bush is that he hasn't been tough enough on domestic spending. The terror caused by the collapse of levees in New Orleans, a bridge in Minneapolis and a steam pipe in Manhattan, and the daily reality of overcrowded schools and kids without healthcare, take a back seat to their desire to cut domestic spending and roll back Medicare and Social Security to preserve tax cuts and a growing military budget. GOP front-runner Rudy Giuliani boasts that he is the true economic conservative in the race. His twelve "commitments to the American people" are laced with the usual bromides: "cut taxes," "fiscal discipline," "cut wasteful Washington spending," "expand America's involvement in the global economy." His stump speech, muscular on Iraq, terrorism and his "leadership" abilities, is strikingly anemic on economic issues. Giuliani clearly thinks it ain't broke and needn't be fixed.

In rare contrast, Mitt Romney has developed an activist growth agenda that mirrors advice proffered by former Treasury Secretary Robert Rubin to Democratic candidates. Romney embraces free trade but argues that because "design and innovation ultimately are done best next to manufacturing," "it's critical, therefore, that America maintain our lead [*sic*] in manufacturing." For Romney, this requires government to expand investment in R&D and education, cut healthcare costs by making it universal and achieve energy independence. The latter, he argues heretically, "can't be achieved by simply counting on the market to do its job." Government must provide investments and regulations. He supports tougher trade policies with China, but this is stock rhetoric, likely to be ignored if he's elected. Romney then contradicts this agenda by reciting the conservative gospel: lower taxes, less spending, removing "undue regulatory burdens." It's as if he can't resist

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flashing a little knowledge before moving into pander patter.

As David Sirota has noted, former Arkansas Governor Mike Huckabee presents himself as at least a half-bore populist, saying he's not a "wholly owned subsidiary" of Wall Street. Huckabee raised taxes and the minimum wage in Arkansas, and his heresies on trade were denounced as "class-warfare rhetoric" by the conservative Club for Growth. Huckabee argues that "we can't have free trade if it's not fair trade." However, he embraces such conservative follies as the flat tax, which would hike taxes on the middle class while lowering them on the wealthy.

The Democratic debate has been driven by the populism of John Edwards's "two Americas" rhetoric, as well as the boldness of his proposals on healthcare and energy. He argues, "None of this happened by accident. Washington is broken. The system is rigged. Cronyism and corporate interests prevail over fairness and the best interests of the American people. Washington puts Wall Street before Main Street. Pharmaceutical companies before patients. Agricultural conglomerates before family farmers. If you want to think about all this in a very simple way, it's that Washington values wealth over work."

The similarities between the Democratic candidates are more striking than the differences. All decry the stark inequality of the Bush era. All champion a more progressive economic agenda: rolling back top-end tax cuts and ending the Iraq War to fund healthcare for all, investment in new energy, education and vital infrastructure. All support reforms to help workers organize, to raise the minimum wage and to expand training and assistance to displaced workers. But most also promise to balance the budget, sustain most of the Bush tax cuts and increase military spending.

Some contrasts are worth noting. Only Edwards has challenged the Democratic fetish about balanced budgets, arguing that moving to new energy and providing healthcare are more important. In contrast, Hillary Clinton talks as if deficits were still a primary problem, and Bill Richardson has bizarrely espoused a balanced-budget amendment, the idiocy popularized by Newt Gingrich in last decade's Contract With America. All Democrats now question the corporate trade regime, calling for adding labor and environmental protections to future accords. Here Dennis Kucinich is boldest, vowing to repeal NAFTA and withdraw the United States from the World Trade Organization. Edwards has forced poverty onto the agenda, disdaining the conventional wisdom that the poor don't vote. Proving that no good deed goes unpunished, he has been rewarded by GOP and mainstream press gibes about his personal investments and wealth, as if a rich man is a hypocrite if he advocates for the less fortunate.

Clinton, dubbed Wall Street's favorite on the cover of *Fortune*, has taken on Rubin's acolytes as advisers. Yet she's combined a bold agenda with a cogent populist critique of Bush policies, railing against "tax breaks to oil companies, no-bid contracts to Halliburton, tax incentives to corporations shipping jobs overseas, tax cut after tax cut to multimillionaires." Barack Obama has thus far largely echoed the common Democratic themes.

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COMMENT

The credit crisis—and the bailout of Wall Street's high rollers—will insure that the economy gets more attention in future months, even if we avoid a recession. Yet the stark contrast between the two parties is already clear. Republicans, with the exception of Huckabee, tout Bush's success; Democrats decry an economy that benefits only the few. Republicans embrace the conservative dogmas. Democrats support an activist progressive government on the side of working people, but thus far their policies still seem far more limited than the challenges we face.

ROBERT L. BOROSAGE AND KATRINA VANDEN HEUVEL

Robert L. Borosage is co-director of the Campaign for America's Future.

Exporting Instability

Under the guise of promoting a "security dialogue" in the Persian Gulf, the Bush Administration has proposed $63 billion in arms transfers to the Middle East over the next ten years. As is so often the case, team Bush seems to prefer to let the weapons do the talking, even when it claims to be engaging in diplomacy. The foundation of the deal is a pledge to sell $20 billion worth of high-tech arms to Saudi Arabia and the other oil-producing states in the Gulf. Items in the package reportedly include upgrades to Riyadh's US-supplied fighter planes, satellite-guided bombs and combat ships. To ease any concerns about the Gulf buildup, the plan calls for increasing military aid to Israel and Egypt to $3 billion and $1.3 billion per year, respectively. That's $43 billion in US taxpayer support over the next decade.

Why pour more weapons into the region now? The principal rationale appears to be to send a message to Iran that it must bend to US pressure to end its nuclear program, stop the flow of Iranian weapons to Iraqi insurgents and cease its support for Hamas and Hezbollah. Otherwise, the argument goes, not only will Tehran face the prospect of US military action but it will also be surrounded by neighbors armed with top-of-the-line US weaponry. The arms package will be seen as even more provocative by Iran in light of the latest move in the Bush Administration's campaign to turn up the pressure on the regime: the recent decision to label its Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps a terrorist organization.

Threatening Iran with military strikes and arms sales to potential adversaries is more likely to spur Tehran to add to its own arsenal while being less open to talks on its nuclear program. If the Bush Administration is looking for a new designated enemy to stand in for the late Saddam Hussein, this approach will work just fine. But if it wants to solve the security problems of the region, it would be hard to come up with a more counterproductive policy.

Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice and Secretary of Defense Robert Gates have tried to paper over the real intent of the deal by arguing that it will promote "stability" by bolstering moderate regimes. This is a strange assertion, especially as regards Saudi Arabia. Not only are funds from Saudi sources supporting insurgents in Iraq, but they are financing Islamic extremism around the world. The Saudis also operate one of the most repressive regimes on the planet, in direct contradiction of the Administration's continuing claims to be promoting democracy. The State Department's latest human rights report on Saudi Arabia contains this upbeat passage: "Religious police harassed, abused and detained citizens and foreigners of both sexes." The most recent Human Rights Watch Saudi report points out that "the government undertook no major human rights reforms in 2006, and there were signs of backsliding in issues of human rights defenders, freedom of association, and freedom of expression." Sending more weapons will not reverse these trends, which does not bode well for long-term stability in the Saudi kingdom.

In Egypt, decades of US aid have had no positive impact on human rights or democracy. Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak runs a quasi-Stalinist regime that won 88 percent of the vote in the last national elections while jailing numerous democracy advocates. As the State Department has acknowledged, torture is still widely practiced in Egyptian prisons, while Cairo's overall human rights record is described as "poor." Rewarding the Egyptian government with an increase in US military aid is tantamount to condoning these repressive practices—practices that are producing a popular backlash that could eventually lead to the end of the regime. If that happens, whatever government comes to power next will inherit huge stockpiles of US-supplied weaponry.

As for Israel, more military aid is the last thing it needs. In recent times Tel Aviv has used its military in ways that have undermined its own security as well as that of its neighbors. From the ongoing attacks on Gaza to last summer's invasion of Lebanon, the Israeli government has unintentionally offered aid and comfort to hard-line forces, both among the Palestinians and in Lebanon. Israel has plenty of weapons; what it needs is a return to genuine diplomacy, ideally prodded by its closest ally, Washington.

Sixty years of arms racing has repeatedly undermined prospects for Middle East peace. Why should this latest round be any different? The only clear beneficiaries of this mega-deal will be US arms makers. Already gorging on expenditures for the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, companies like Boeing, General Electric and General Dynamics can anticipate ten years of lucrative foreign sales if the deal goes forward. The arms lobby can be expected to vigorously support the deal if it is challenged on Capitol Hill.

Thankfully, there has been early opposition in Congress. Representative Anthony Weiner has pulled together a group of 114 House members opposed to the deal. Now the foreign affairs committee chairs in the House and Senate, Representative Tom Lantos and Senator Joe Biden, need to move from skepticism to opposition. They should hold hearings as soon as Congress comes back in September. And Hillary Clinton and Barack Obama need to join their rival John Edwards in roundly denouncing the deal. If there is a significant public debate about its likely impacts, it won't withstand even minimal scrutiny.

Mideast stability can't be promoted with arms, any more than democracy can be imposed through the barrel of a gun. Stopping or scaling back the Bush Administration's Mideast arms package would be a step toward learning this lesson.

WILLIAM D. HARTUNG

William D. Hartung is the director of the Arms and Security Initiative at the New America Foundation.

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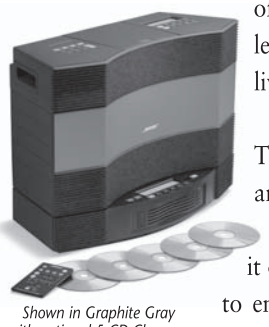

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ERIC ALTERMAN

It Ain't Necessarily So…

Along with the (now stalled) rush toward massive conglomeration and the (accelerating) rash of budget-cutting in news-gathering operations, perhaps the two most visible trends across nearly all mainstream US media in recent decades have been an increasing inclination toward tabloid-style coverage coupled with an intense effort to win over conservative critics of alleged liberal media bias. Both have been routinely justified by the media moguls by what they deem to be the demands of the marketplace. "We'd like to report on important stuff," goes the argument, "but these bozos want Paris and Britney, preferably with Rush or O'Reilly reporting."

In fact, if decades of public opinion data are to be believed, both aspects of these arguments are false. The vast majority of Americans profess little interest in tabloid trash and right-wing reaction. The Pew Research Center recently synthesized two decades of American news preferences and discovered, personal finance stories aside, that they haven't much changed. When it comes to American attention spans, disaster stories rule, while insider-Washington and foreign stories languish. Barely a quarter of Americans say they pay "very close attention" to anything. Nothing new there…

What is most shocking, particularly when considering the steady diet of dirt we're constantly force-fed, is how little people care about celebrity scandals. Just 8 percent of Americans said they were following "very closely" the events surrounding Michael Jackson's child-molestation trial when it began in February 2005, a number that rose to only 12 percent the following month, after the television networks all but relocated their headquarters to Jacko's backyard.

Lord knows, it's not easy for a journalist to interest a mass audience in the issues they need to understand to be good democratic citizens. This has always been the challenge to those charged with not only the protections of the First Amendment but also the extremely profitable access to the public airwaves. But what can possibly be the argument for giving people junk they don't even desire?

Thomas Patterson of Harvard's Kennedy School of Government did a study of US news media from 1980 to 1999 and found that news stories that had no clear connection to policy issues increased from less than 35 percent of all stories in 1980 to roughly 50 percent in 2000, and taking all news outlets into account, approximately 25 percent of news stories contained a moderate-to-high level of sensationalism in 1980 compared with nearly 40 percent in 2000. And yet the period Patterson studied was a Golden Age compared with the present.

According to the Project for Excellence in Journalism's News Index for the first week in June of this year, for instance, the fifth biggest story of the week was the on-again, off-again incarceration of Paris Hilton. On cable, Paris ranked number three and on radio, four. Still, her story was a piker compared with the death of the no-less-famous-for-no-good-reason Anna Nicole Smith. According to PEJ, during February 8 and 9, coverage of Anna Nicole Smith's death made up roughly 60 percent of the morning news shows. To say nothing of the wall-to-wall cable coverage it received. And yet, according to Pew, viewer interest in Smith's death ranked in the bottom third of stories covered that quarter, not only way below the number of people who claim to follow closely the news about Iraq but also below those who continue to maintain a deep interest in global warming. (Cable's attention to the Iraq War ranged from a mere 8 percent of coverage on Fox News to 18 percent on CNN during the second quarter of 2007.)

No less misguided is the news business's pursuit of a public it believes has shifted rightward. While it may be a staple of punditry to assume Americans have grown more conservative in recent decades, the data disagree. As political scientists Jacob Hacker and Paul Pierson observe, "It is striking that across all of the major left-right issues, one is hard pressed to find any evidence that Americans are markedly more conservative today than they were in the recent (and even relatively distant) past." No doubt the political system has moved rightward. Careful calculations by political economists Keith Poole and Howard Rosenthal demonstrate that the average Republican member of Congress was 73 percent more conservative in 2003 than his 1973 counterpart, and his Senate colleague was approximately twice as right-wing. While the Poole/Rosenthal calculations find the average 2003 Democratic member of Congress to be 28 percent more liberal than his early 1970s counterpart, this is almost entirely due to the sudden political extinction of the party's conservative Southern wing. Non-Southern Democrats have actually traveled a bit to the right. Meanwhile, on most issues, the majority of Americans have actually moved slightly leftward—leaving the center of gravity of the political system well to the right of the public on issue after issue.

What appears to be going on here is not a rise in the size of the audience that prizes Fox News–style nonsense. Rather, it's that the proportion of people who get their news from traditional sources has sunk significantly. Given their relative paucity of production values, talk-radio and cable news programs can be profitably sustained with audiences that are a fraction of those required by broadcast and entertainment programs. The fact that most Americans find themselves increasingly alienated from the system that Rupert Murdoch, Roger Ailes and Rush Limbaugh have pioneered has not led their competitors to rethink the content of their broadcasts, only to focus more intensely on what remains of their diminishing audiences. Given the tendency of so many reporters to follow the herd news of the day—Edwards's haircut, Hillary's cleavage—the net result is a perversion of our political process in pursuit of an understandably alienated American public.

Can you imagine a worse way to run a democracy? ■

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NAOMI KLEIN

Big Brother Democracy

Recently, as protesters gathered outside the Security and Prosperity Partnership (SPP) summit in Montebello, Quebec, to confront US President George W. Bush, Mexican President Felipe Calderón and Canadian Prime Minister Stephen Harper, the Associated Press reported this surreal detail: "Leaders were not able to see the protesters in person, but they could watch the protesters on TV monitors inside the hotel.... Cameramen hired to ensure that demonstrators would be able to pass along their messages to the three leaders sat idly in a tent full of audio and video equipment.... A sign on the outside of the tent said, 'Our cameras are here today providing your RIGHT TO BE SEEN AND HEARD. Please let us help you get your message out. Thank You.'"

Yes, it's true: Like contestants on a reality TV show, protesters at the SPP were invited to vent into video cameras, their rants to be beamed to protest-trons inside the summit enclave. It was security state as infotainment—*Big Brother* meets, well, Big Brother.

The spokesperson for Prime Minister Harper explained that although protesters were herded into empty fields, the video-link meant that their right to political speech was protected. "Under the law, they need to be seen and heard, and they will be."

It is an argument with sweeping implications. If videotaping activists meets the legal requirement that dissenting citizens have the right to be seen and heard, what else might fit the bill? How about all the other security cameras that patrolled the summit—the ones filming demonstrators as they got on and off buses and peacefully walked down the street? What about the cellphone calls that were intercepted, the meetings that were infiltrated, the e-mails that were read? According to the new rules set out in Montebello, all of these actions may soon be recast not as infringements on civil liberties but the opposite: proof of our leaders' commitment to direct, unmediated consultation.

Elections are a crude tool for taking the public temperature—these methods allow constant, exact monitoring of our beliefs. Think of surveillance as the new participatory democracy; of wiretapping as the political equivalent of *Total Request Live*.

Protesters in Montebello complained that while they were locked out, CEOs from about thirty of the largest corporations in North America—from Wal-Mart to Chevron—were part of the official summit. But perhaps they had it backward: The CEOs had only an hour and fifteen minutes of face time with the leaders. The activists were being "seen and heard" around the clock. So perhaps instead of shouting about police state tactics, they should have said, "Thank you for listening." (And reading, and watching, and photographing, and data-mining.)

The Montebello "seen and heard" rule also casts the target of the protests in a new light. The SPP is described in the leaders' final statement as an "ambitious" plan to "keep our borders closed to terrorism yet open to trade." In other words, a merger of the North American Free Trade Agreement and the homeland security complex—NAFTA with spy planes.

The model dates back to September 11, when the US Ambassador to Canada, Paul Cellucci, pronounced that in the new era, "security will trump trade." But there was an out clause: The trade on which Canada's and Mexico's economies depend could continue uninterrupted, as long as those governments were willing to welcome the tentacles of the US "war on terror." Canadian and Mexican business leaders leapt to surrender, aggressively pushing their governments to give in to US demands for "integrated" security in order to keep the goods and tourists flowing.

Almost six years later, the business leaders at Montebello—under the banner of the North American Competitiveness Council, an official wing of the SPP—were still holding up "thickening borders" as the bogeyman. The fix? According to the SPP website, "technological solutions, improved information-sharing, and, potentially, the use of biometric identifiers." From experience we know what this means: continent-wide no-fly lists, searchable and integrated databases, as well as the $2.5 billion contract to Boeing to build a "virtual fence" on the northern and southern borders of the United States, equipped with unmanned drones.

In short, under the SPP vision of the continent, "thick" borders will soon be replaced with a nearly invisible web of continental surveillance—almost all of it run for profit. Two members of the SPP advisory group—Lockheed Martin and General Electric—have already received multibillion-dollar contracts from the US government to build this web. In the Bush era, security doesn't trump big business; it may be the biggest business of all.

In the run-up to the SPP summit, a spate of surveillance scandals helped paint a fuller picture. First, Congress not only failed to curtail the National Security Agency's warrantless wiretapping but opened the door to snooping into bank records, phone call patterns and even physical searches—all without any onus to prove the subject is a threat. Next, the *Boston Globe* reported on plans to link thousands of CCTV cameras on streets, subways, apartment buildings and businesses into networks capable of tracking suspects in real time. And on August 15, confirmation came that the National Geospatial-Intelligence Agency—the arm of the US military that runs spy planes and satellites over enemy territory—would be fully integrated into the infrastructure of domestic intelligence gathering and local policing, becoming what the agency calls the "eyes" to the NSA's "ears."

Add a few more high-tech tools—biometric IDs, facial-recognition software, networked databases of "suspects," GPS bundled into ever more electronic devices—and you have something like the world of total surveillance most recently portrayed in *The Bourne Ultimatum*.

Which brings us back to the Security and Prosperity Partnership. Who needs clumsy old border checks when the authorities are making sure we are seen and heard at all times—in high definition, online and off-, on land and from the sky? Security is the new prosperity. Surveillance is the new democracy. ■

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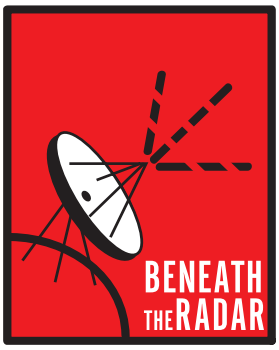
GARY YOUNGE

The Dog Days of War



On Friday morning, August 17, Nick Travis protested in Crawford, Texas, as George Bush arrived for a barbecue. "We were making sure there was some kind of protest," explains Travis. "That he at least saw a sign. It was a presence." There were four of them. One was arrested.

It's been two years since Cindy Sheehan set up Camp Casey outside Bush's ranch to protest the war in the name of her son, who was killed in Iraq. In those two years we have seen the Democrats take back both houses of Congress; the Iraq Study Group call for a pullback of US troops; and the public, punditocracy and political class all reverse their position on the war.

In that time we have also seen an escalation of US troops, no letup in the vast number of civilian and combatant casualties (including US troops) and the exodus of Iraq's professional class. In short, in the past two years most people's views about what needed to happen changed and what actually happened did not.

Given the outlook in August 2005, even this is no small feat. Back then, demonstrations in Crawford were about more than just a physical presence. They marked a political moment. All the polls suggested that public sentiment on the war had shifted from frustration to despair but had found inadequate and inconsistent expression in Congress and the press. The mainstream had effectively been marginalized.

Then along came Cindy. Packaged as an Everymother just looking for answers, she made the cable shows and supermarket magazine covers. She had in fact been around for quite some time. (*The Nation* had featured her on the cover four months earlier.) But now the word was flowing beyond our ideological shores. In the space of a month, Sheehan went from being an activist with energy and a compelling story to a household name who could spark 1,627 local vigils in solidarity.

In the absence of a cohesive, media-savvy antiwar movement, she became the face of protest. As such she did not so much lead public opinion as embody it. Her prominence illustrated the actual weakness of the left as much as it did its potential strength. In the American public, progressives had a receptive audience; but we have failed to meaningfully reach them. "It's rare when people seriously publicly engage," Leslie Cagan, national coordinator of United for Peace and Justice, told me after Bush announced the "surge." "They watch it on TV. They read about it in the newspapers. They get angry, but that doesn't necessarily mean they engage."

That disconnect remains both our greatest challenge and our weakest link. We may toast Karl Rove's departure and Bush's woes and tout polling figures that show increasing backing for withdrawal and against occupation. But the fact that the Republicans are losing public support for the war doesn't necessarily mean that we have won the argument against it.

For the mounting opposition is primarily informed less by a mass conversion against imperialism than by a far more basic factor: America is losing. "The most important single fact is that the public perceive the mission as being destined for success," says Christopher Gelpi, a professor of political science at Duke University who studies US public opinion and war. "The American public is partly casualty-phobic, but it is primarily defeat-phobic. You can muster support for just about any military operation in the US so long as you can get enough of the defeat-phobic people on board."

True, it would be churlish not to delight in the demise of the neocons and the now-dominant consensus that this war was a mistake. But it would be equally deluded to pretend that we got here by dint of our reasoning and rallying alone. Opposition to the war is broad, but it is not deep. A change of fortunes for the United States in Iraq would erase much of it. The fact that such a change is unlikely is shaped by military reality, not political persuasion. In short, the opposition to "this" particular war has grown, but support for the principle of American-led intervention has barely shifted. The percentage of those who think the war in Iraq was justified stands in the low 40s, but support for the war in Afghanistan stands at 70 percent.

"We are all capable of believing things which we *know* to be untrue," wrote George Orwell in his essay "In Front of Your Nose," "and then, when we are finally proved wrong, impudently twisting the facts so as to show that we were right. Intellectually, it is possible to carry on this process for an indefinite time: the only check on it is that sooner or later a false belief bumps up against solid reality, usually on a battlefield."

Which brings us back to Cindy Sheehan. Exposed and increasingly exasperated with the lack of political leadership following the Democratic midterm victory, Sheehan recently retired from campaigning, only to return to the fray soon afterward. But this time she transformed the object of her ire from Bush to House leader Nancy Pelosi, whom she is running against in San Francisco.

This is a strategic error. Not because Pelosi should not be confronted—"Power concedes nothing without a demand. It never did and it never will," said Frederick Douglass—but because the most effective confrontation the Democratic leadership will understand at this point is not electoral; it is political.

Democrats have already proved themselves an inadequate and ineffective vehicle for our antiwar hopes—most of their senators, including all of those now running for President who were there at the time, voted for the war. But they are also the most responsive to pressure from the antiwar movement. Pelosi may prove to be an obstacle—but she is not the enemy. It will take the engagement of the angry at every level to force the conversation in Washington from virtual opposition to the war to actually ending it. Sheehan should learn from her own example; 2005 was not an election year. She has already shown us that, whatever the limitations, our only way to reach those who will only go to the polls and raise funds is by taking to the streets and raising hell. ■

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ARTICLES

THE LOWER NINTH BATTLES BACK

REBECCA SOLNIT

The word "will" comes up constantly in the Lower Ninth Ward now; WE WILL REBUILD is spray-painted onto empty houses; "it will happen," one organizer told me. Will itself may achieve the ambitious objective of bringing this destroyed neighborhood back to life, and for many New Orleanians a ferocious determination seems the only alternative to being overwhelmed and becalmed. But the fate of the neighborhood is still up in the air, from the question of whether enough people can and will make it back to the nagging questions of how viable a city and an ecology they will be part of. The majority of houses in this isolated neighborhood are still empty, though about a tenth of the residents are back, some already living in rehabilitated houses, some camped in stark white FEMA trailers outside, some living elsewhere while getting their houses ready. If you measured the Lower Ninth Ward by will, solidarity and dedication, from both residents and far-flung volunteers and nonprofits, it would be among the best neighborhoods in the United States. If you measured it by infrastructure and probabilities, it looks pretty grim. There are more devastated neighborhoods in New Orleans and neighboring St. Bernard Parish, let alone Mississippi and the Delta, but the Lower Ninth got hit hard by Katrina. Its uncertain fate has come to be an indicator for the future of New Orleans and the fate of its African-American majority.

The place has come a long way already. Even seven months after the storm, when I first visited the Lower Ninth, it was spookily unpopulated and almost untouched since the storm. Cars that had been flipped and tossed by the waters still stood up against buildings, atop each other, hung over fences and laid on their backs. Houses that had been shoved by the force of the water into the middle of the street or that had been smashed into splinters looked untouched, except by sardonic graffiti: THANKS FOR NOTHING FEMA on one dislodged building; a simple BAGHDAD on another house later rehabilitated by Common Ground Collective, the radical relief group co-founded by ex–Black Panther Malik Rahim. Debris was everywhere. Down near the levee break, Common Ground had opened up a little tool-lending and supply center where returnees could get volunteer help, and its logo flew defiantly over the blue house: SOLIDARITY NOT CHARITY with a black fist holding a wrench.

The ruinous terrain of the Lower Ninth contrasts with the vibrancy of the culture there. New Orleans remains troubled by deep race and class divides and high levels of crime, but the city, by all accounts, also had a lot more civic life than most of the United States—not just cavorting in the streets during Mardi Gras season but a long tradition of gregariousness and neighborliness; people knew their neighbors, talked to strangers, called everyone by endearments, invited everyone on the block to the crawfish boil, had strong networks in carnival krewes, second-lines, music groups, social clubs, churches, to say nothing of the extended families so many people have. (The Lower Ninth had a high percentage of homeowners, but even the renters often rented from relatives or lived near homeowning family members.) It's why a lot of people come back, or want to, and it's a major resource for reclaiming the city—though it can't replace money and institutional willpower. Though various forms of government support exist, most people regard the capricious red-tape bureaucracies with frustration at best. Many homeowners have found that they are not eligible for Road Home (the state rebuilding program) or other funding, for one reason or another, and even the eligible have found the rules strangling and the flow of money excruciatingly slow and unpredictable.

In the Lower Ninth, the wrecked cars, smashed houses and debris are gone, for the most part, and a lot of the remaining

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houses look pretty good, though mold and other damage can be hard to see. People have even made their own street signs, further evidence of social strength and institutional weakness. NENA, the Lower Ninth Ward Neighborhood Empowerment Network Association, keeps a big map in its cement-block office—lent by St. David's Catholic Church next door—with a green pushpin for every returnee, and the green dots are scattered everywhere, though they represent only a small percentage of homes and residents. NENA was founded by resident Patricia Jones, a former small business owner, with many other Lower Ninth Ward residents, in April 2006, and the organization helps people cut through the extraordinary red tape that surrounds the new building codes, the Road Home fund, the insurance regulations and other bureaucracies returnees face, but it also fosters connections and community.

Though a lot of outside organizations are here, locals lead most of the efforts. I asked Linda Jackson, a member of NENA, how the community felt about the assistance pouring in from around the world, and she replied in her whispery voice, "They're stunned. They never thought the world would reach out the way they did. I'm not going to say that it makes up for [the initial, official Katrina response], but the help that we've been given from throughout the US and the world, it makes us work that much harder. We say: You know what, if these people can come down here and take off of work, drop out of school for a couple weeks, there's no way, there's just no way we can have a negative attitude. These people feel this way, that's something worth fighting for. And that's what we're doing at this point."

Not long after the storm, in October 2005, the Sierra Club—which has long been involved in environmental justice politics in the Lower Ninth—convened a press conference. The club's young president, Lisa Renstrom, spoke of the need to "rebuild smarter and better" and "repair the inequities of the past." Pam Dashiell, a longtime neighborhood activist and organizer for the environmental group the Louisiana Bucket Brigade, recalls, "A bunch of us were able to come on that day, and what a great day that was too. And we sat down together and talked about creating a plan for the community and ourselves." Dashiell, a warm, easygoing political powerhouse, had been president of the Holy Cross Neighborhood Association (Holy Cross is the southern stretch of the Lower Ninth and its highest ground). As members of the HCNA began to return, they held meetings several times a week. They still meet weekly rather than monthly, as they did before Katrina. Though there are many forces at work in restoring the neighborhood, not all of which intersect, the HCNA has been potent for both its ambition and its coordination of many outside groups and funders, including the Sierra Club. And while a lot of individuals and groups aspired to restore only what had been, the HCNA looked at how to make the Lower Ninth better.

Rebecca Solnit is the author of a dozen books, including, most recently, Storming the Gates of Paradise: Landscapes for Politics. *She lives in San Francisco with her earthquake supplies.*

The list of who came to help sounds like the setup for a joke: A Black Panther, an accountant, a bunch of Methodists and the mayor of Portland walk into a bar. Or if you prefer, Brad Pitt, some graduate students, lots of young anarchists and the Sierra Club walk in. No one yet has assessed the scale of the volunteer influx to New Orleans, which has been compared to Freedom Summer during the civil rights era but has far outstripped it in sheer numbers. It's a safe understatement to say that more than 100,000 volunteers have come from out of town, and they have done and are doing everything from medical care, food preparation, demolition and construction to aid with red tape and planning.

There is great dynamism here in the Lower Ninth, and determination, but the obstacles are huge, and many residents are still missing, far more than are back. Most of the returnees have lost family members to the Katrina diaspora, and the fabric of the neighborhood is still mostly holes. Dashiell evacuated to St. Louis with her daughter, her daughter's partner and grandchild. Only she returned, and she returned even though she was a renter who had lost everything in her home. That she loves the Lower Ninth is as clear as that she is a major force for its revival. Little more than a month after Katrina, she told the press, "We're not going down," and "We want to rebuild in the best, healthiest and most sustainable way." She told me this summer, "Our reputation was worse than the reality. Lower Nine was a synonym for poor, dark-skinned and crime-ridden."

Local groups are struggling to 'rebuild smarter and better,' but the obstacles are huge, and many residents are still not back.

To understand the strength of the Holy Cross Neighborhood Association, you need to understand that the environmental and social issues here did not begin on August 29, 2005. Founded in 1981, the HCNA had fought the attempt to build another lock on the Industrial Canal more than ten years earlier. Darryl Malek-Wiley, a big, cheerful white-haired white guy who lives at the opposite end of town, became an environmental justice organizer for the Sierra Club, and his focus has long been on this neighborhood. So the Sierra Club and the HCNA were already in place when Katrina hit; Common Ground, Emergency Communities, NENA, the People's Hurricane Relief Fund and other organizations emerged in the wake of the storm.

A lot of people elsewhere bought the story that these places did not make environmental sense to reclaim and re-inhabit. Dashiell recalls that the developers who were part of the city's Bring New Orleans Back Commission "were in reality looking at ways to not bring the Lower Nine back. To hear what they were really saying at that level and what they were doing was just unbelievable, and for me that was a catalyst. We had to do something. We organized. We developed a plan. We were everywhere we could be." Environmentalists were the ones "who provided the support."

The HCNA pursued a rebuilding effort that would address the ways New Orleans had chosen to violate the natural landscape. Unlike mostly middle-class, white Lakeview or New Orleans East, home to many Vietnamese-Americans, the Lower Ninth is not a new neighborhood or one on extremely low ground, and its ecological precariousness is relatively recent.

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There were inhabitants here in the early nineteenth century, long before the Industrial Canal cut off the Lower Ninth along its western edge from the rest of the city. This canal, dug in the 1920s to provide a direct waterway between Lake Pontchartrain and the Mississippi River, which forms the neighborhood's southern border, is penned in by levees that had failed catastrophically before, in Hurricane Betsy in 1965.

Another watery border, this time in the bayou to the north, was gouged out in the 1960s and named the Mississippi River Gulf Outlet Canal, or MR-GO. It created a shorter route for shipping traffic—and for storm surges, salinization and the loss of some 27,000 acres of wetlands, making yet another unnatural edge of vulnerability for the place. Thanks to erosion, it is far wider than the US Army Corps of Engineers originally made it. Breaches of the MR-GO canal's levees were responsible for much of the flooding of St. Bernard Parish and the Lower Ninth in 2005, and water that surged up this "hurricane highway" may have been responsible for the even more devastating breaches of the Industrial Canal. It is quite literally a murderous piece of engineering, and in July even the Army Corps of Engineers finally agreed that it should be closed.

Restoring the wetlands at the Lower Ninth's northern edge is a challenge that has been taken up by the HCNA, with the University of Wisconsin's Water Resources Management doing the research. One of the first facts that emerged is that a forest had died there, in Bayou Bienvenue (which is also the southern periphery of New Orleans East, though the two places are many miles apart by road). The cypress forest that could still be seen in photographs from the 1950s died of the salinity from the MR-GO canal, and with it went one layer of protection against storm surges. A forest would buffer any future storm surge, and the trees would help hold the wetlands as land rather than open water. One idea under consideration is to develop the wetlands to serve as the final filtration system for New Orleans's sewage-system discharge, which, unsurprisingly, comes out near there. Such filtration systems have been developed in progressive/alternative areas like Arcata, California; putting one in a poor community of color that is as much the inner city as the ecological edge is a radical shift in who gets to go green. Other proposals involve building nature trails and recreational facilities. The landscape architecture department at the University of Colorado, Denver, has also shown up to aid the Lower Ninth, and its students are participating in landscape design for the wetlands.

And then there's the new development down by the Mississippi, organized by Global Green—a US branch of Mikhail Gorbachev's Green Cross International—but orchestrated by the movie star Brad Pitt. Pitt, who with his partner, Angelina Jolie, and kids temporarily relocated to New Orleans after Katrina to film a movie, has reportedly been interested in architecture for a while. He helped organize and underwrote a competition to design sustainable housing for New Orleans. Originally, the project was to have generated houses across New Orleans, but after Pitt met Pam Dashiell and the HCNA, he decided all the resources should go into the Lower Ninth. Members of the neighborhood group got involved in the competition to design an eighteen-unit apartment building, several single-family homes and a community center that will include daycare facilities. The Home Depot Foundation put up major money for construction,

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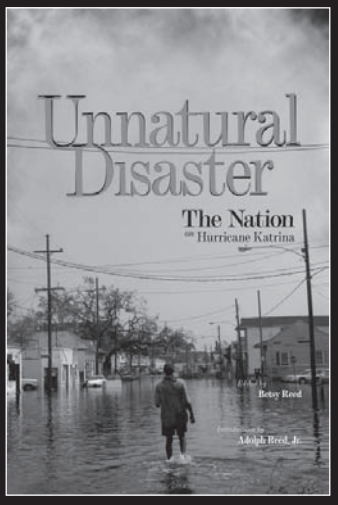

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and ground was broken this summer on the former industrial land Global Green purchased.

The Lower Ninth also drew in the Sharp Solar Energy Systems Group, which initially decided to put minimal solar systems on five New Orleans roofs, and finally ended up putting far more extensive systems on ten rooftops in the Holy Cross area, including a system on the roof of NENA. Again the HCNA was a partner in developing the program. One argument for solar and related hyperlocal programs is that after the next disaster, those who aren't on the grid won't be hamstrung by its failure. Another is that if New Orleans is a major victim of climate change, it should be a major player in carbon-neutral energy sources and green building. Malek-Wiley also emphasizes less glamorous environmental steps being taken in the neighborhood, including installing heat-reflective insulation in attics and getting the city to recycle some of the cleared-away debris and not just dump it all in leaking landfills on the Vietnamese community's side of Bayou Bienvenue.

Restored local wetlands, green housing, solar roofs—these are only small pieces of the large puzzle of restoring one tiny area of the Gulf Coast. The Army Corps of Engineers is rebuilding New Orleans's levees to withstand a Katrina-level event, not a Category 5 hurricane. The ocean is rising. The wetlands farther out to sea are eroding. The city as a whole is in trouble. Like depopulated cities such as Detroit, it faces real problems about a shrunken tax base for the same-size footprint. New Orleans had been in steady economic decline since the 1960s, and nothing much suggests that's about to turn around now. Regeneration of this one neighborhood, like so many others, could be undermined or sabotaged by these larger forces. But the Gulf Coast will also be rebuilt one piece at a time, and this piece doesn't lack the powerful tools of will, vision or love. ■

AS EDUCATIONAL REFORM THRIVES IN NEW ORLEANS, PUBLIC SCHOOLS ARE LEFT BEHIND.

The Charter School Flood

MICHAEL TISSERAND

Rob Wyman says he couldn't field any more questions about error-filled report cards, so he made this sign and tacked it onto his office bulletin board: "We are sorry. We did not do the report cards. We don't know how the problems happened. We do not know how to fix the problems."

He knew it was not the best way to explain to angry high school students why they hadn't received accurate credit for their work. But incorrect report cards weren't the worst problem at Joseph T. Clark High School, one of approximately twenty-five schools that were operated during the past school year by the State of Louisiana in the so-called Recovery School District (RSD) in New Orleans.

Wyman, the school's guidance counselor, pulled open his top desk drawer and took out a sheet of paper that was covered with hand-drawn squares and arrows. In his spare time, he said, he has been devising escape routes from the school in case of a fire. The school hasn't had a drill all year, he said. "The students have no idea where to go. The teachers have no idea where to go. Here's the kicker: We have kids in wheelchairs on the second floor, and I'm afraid for their safety."

As he spoke, groups of students milled about in the hallway outside his office, near the school's metal detectors. Some of the students in the building were taking the LEAP test—the state's high-stakes exam that monitors schools' progress and decides if a student will be promoted to the next grade. For those who had already taken the test during a previous session, holding rooms had been assigned. The rooms weren't monitored by the students' regular teachers, and students were periodically popping into Wyman's office, saying they didn't have any work and pleading to use the phone to call their parents or guardians to come pick them up. He declined each request in apologetic tones. "My job isn't to help you leave school," he said to one student.

MARIO TAMA/GETTY IMAGES

John McDonogh Sr. High School's 2007 commencement—its first since Hurricane Katrina

Wyman spent his lunch break leading me on a tour through the school. When we reached an upstairs classroom, William Perkinson waved us in. Perkinson readily acknowledged he had never taught before he came to Clark; he had a college degree but no teaching training or credentials. He just answered an ad in the paper. When he arrived at the school, he walked into a room filled

Michael Tisserand's latest book is Sugarcane Academy: How a New Orleans Teacher and His Storm-Struck Students Created a School to Remember *(Harcourt). He can be contacted through www.michaeltisserand.com. Research support for this article was provided by the Investigative Fund of The Nation Institute.*

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with students doubly traumatized by Katrina and ongoing street violence. "A month ago, one of my students and his brother were shot," he said. "I asked the kids in class the following day if they had any other friends who'd been shot and killed. They called out names and I wrote them on the board. There were eighteen names. I don't know how these kids are handling it."

Perkinson is like many of the new teachers I met in New Orleans over the past year: intelligent, compassionate, overwhelmed. Public-education advocates frequently complained to me that inexperienced teachers in New Orleans found themselves in front of classrooms filled with unfamiliar students, with neither formal written assessments of kids with special needs nor the benefit of experienced teachers in the building who might know the kids and their stories. A lack of formal assessments

Shouting Underwater

WALTER MOSLEY

We are coming up on the two-year mark since the Katrina debacle in Louisiana and Mississippi. I hesitate to call this date an anniversary because the word implies, in some way, a celebration, a birth. What we are scratching on the calendar is more like a notch on a raw gravestone, a count of the days and years that have passed without a reckoning for those who died, those who lost loved ones and for a city that is still in critical condition.

Not only did our government fail to answer the call of its most vulnerable citizens during that fateful period; it still fails each and every day to rebuild, redeem and rescue those who are ignored because of their poverty, their race, their passage into old age.

The disaster named after the hurricane is not confined to the areas affected. Every emergency room, empty bank account and outsourced life's work could be named. We live in a country rife with ignored and condemned poverty. The rich, high on their great corporate steeds, ride over us believing that they are out of the reach of global warming and its symptoms, of terrorism and dwindling natural resources. When government officials tell them to evacuate, they drive their cars, board their corporate jets or simply climb to higher ground with ease. At this very moment they are looking down on Baghdad and New Orleans, Pakistan and Sudan, you and me. The feeling of invulnerability that these people have is unfounded, but nonetheless it makes them reckless. They take chances and cut corners believing that everything will come out all right. Their delusions of grandeur and ultimate power put us in ever more dire straits.

If we call ourselves Americans (and mean it), then we are all victims of Katrina. If we breathe the air or eat fresh fruit, if we call on our cellphones, drink water from a plastic bottle or just nibble on a chocolate bar, then we are Katrina; we are the rising waters around the ankles of this world.

When the day comes to mark off the two-year point since the deluge descended on the Gulf of Mexico, we should take care not to make too much noise. We shouldn't march in that shadow of time or even protest. Rather, we should sit alone in a room with our imaginations open to feel what they experienced on that day: the waters rising, rising and us climbing stairs and ladders, chairs and fire escapes; sitting on rooftops while bodies float by; calling out to passing boats and helicopters that go by in mute witness; being pressed to the roof by the rising tide and being engulfed shouting, shouting out for the ones we love underwater, unheard; the darkness swirling around us as we die with no one coming to save us, or themselves.

Two years have passed and Americans are still displaced, waters are still rising. Wars are raging and we are waiting for a day to vote for a man or a woman who works, not even in secret, for the rich. We wait for this man or woman to lead us out from the disaster like chattel. We feel sorry for the victims as so many felt sorry for Rodney King, not realizing that his defeat was our loss; the blows that rained down on him were also aimed at our freedom, our ability and feeling of responsibility to fight back. Two years have passed and the dead are still dead and the dying are still dying. The clouds gather like angry anthropomorphic gods, and we stumble and fall unable to make a stand or lend a hand or protest all the victims in ghettos, retirement homes, prison wards and dark skins.

Two years have passed and we are still exporting democracy while we continue living under the semibenevolent oligarchy of international corporations and their candidates. This two-year point measures how far we have sunk under the weight of the rich and their political flunkies—while so many of us still celebrate them as if they were pop stars. We experience the silence of drowning men and women. We call out and are not heard. We believe in systems and people who have no faith in us. We perpetuate the rising temperatures and waters and hatred and feelings of hopelessness. New Orleans's defeat is also our defeat. Its closed schools are a metaphor for our minds and our futures. We see the storm's passage but we don't see it coming. But it is coming. And there are no leaders, no corporations, no benevolent billionaires who are going to save our grandmothers and our babies. We must unite outside of the systems that lie like fast food heaped on golden platters at our feet. We must organize at the ground level, where the water has already begun to rise.

Walter Mosley is the author of the bestselling Easy Rawlins series of mysteries; the story collection Always Outnumbered, Always Outgunned*, for which he received the Anisfield-Wolf Book Award;* Life Out of Context*, published by Nation Books; and the novel* Killing Johnny Fry*. He was born in Los Angeles and has been at various times in his life a potter, a computer programmer and a poet. His books have been translated into twenty languages. He lives in New York.*

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violates the federal Individuals With Disabilities Education Act, which states that schools must provide special-needs students with an Individualized Education Program, or IEP. By referring to the IEP, a teacher and an aide can quickly assess a student's needs and offer appropriate lessons. Jim Randels, a veteran teacher at Frederick Douglass High School—also an RSD school—said that his school was 20 percent special education before Katrina but that IEPs are a rarity now. Perkinson confirmed that IEPs were not available to him. "I don't know anything," Perkinson said. "I don't know who's who, what's what. I don't know who's special ed, who's not."

As part of the state takeover of New Orleans's public schools, Clark is but one battleground in what some are calling an education revolution. Parts of the flooded city were still closed off to residents when, in November 2005, the Louisiana legislature cleared the way for the state to assume control of 107 out of 128 schools in the Orleans district. The act clearly targeted New Orleans, which was one of the few districts in the state with enough "academically unacceptable" schools to trigger the takeover. A majority of New Orleans's legislators voted against the act. Immediately, the state began converting many of its newly acquired schools to charter schools—publicly funded schools run by for-profit or nonprofit groups that operate by a "charter," or contract.

Those wishing to launch a charter revolution lacked a platform until the floodwaters rose, sending 65,000 public school students fleeing.

Although the overall recovery of New Orleans has been frustratingly slow, the restructuring of its schools happened nearly overnight. A public district formerly governed by an elected school board and its hired superintendent splintered into city charters, state charters, parish-run selective admission schools and state-run district schools. Parents struggling to make their way back to the city are often shocked to learn that the familiar school down the street is closed to their children because it is now either a charter or filled to capacity with children from across the city. Violence has erupted when students from different sections of the city have found themselves thrown into the same building. "In the two schools where I teach, there are now students from a dozen different schools," Randels says.

In January the New Orleans *Times-Picayune* reported the startling news that hundreds of children had been "wait-listed"—denied entrance to any school—because there were no seats available in any RSD buildings. Yet this number likely doesn't reflect the true number of young victims of the past school year. Lance Hill, executive director of the Southern Institute for Education and Research at Tulane University, told me about a conversation he had with a young woman who couldn't get into her former neighborhood school, which was now chartered. She was offered an RSD school, but because its location was traditionally hostile to kids from her part of town, she didn't feel it was a physically safe option. So she dropped out. When Hill met her, she was working at Wendy's. "The RSD is, without question, the worst school district in America," Hill says.

At a January rally at the state Capitol in Baton Rouge, public school students who organized as the Fyre Youth Squad spelled out the reasons. A light rain fell as students took turns at a microphone, telling stories of overcrowded classrooms and schools where the security-guard-to-student ratio was smaller than the teacher-to-student ratio.

"When John McDonogh Senior High School reopened after Hurricane Katrina, there were thirty-five security guards on staff and only twenty-three teachers," stated Joshua Short, an RSD student and Fyre Youth Squad member. "I felt like I was visiting one of my relatives in prison."

And at an anticrime march through downtown New Orleans earlier this year, students at L.E. Rabouin High School joined other protesters who carried pictures of friends and family members who were victims of the city's escalating violence. They were there to memorialize the school's popular bandleader, Dinerral Shavers, whose shooting death helped spark the rally. While a jazz musician led chants of "music in the schools," the Rabouin students spoke fondly of Shavers. They also lambasted their school's learning environment, which they said included still-frozen salami sandwiches for lunch. That's a familiar complaint from the past year, along with the lack of textbooks and an unchecked population of rats and roaches. "They run into the classroom and everyone cuts up," said one student.

The students' teacher Glenda McQueen brought them to the rally as part of a lesson on Martin Luther King's "Letter From Birmingham Jail." She didn't dispute their description of the school. "These kids are still recovering from the hurricane, trying to pull families together," she said. "It is like they are war-torn."

In New Orleans, the debate over the public schools centers on a question that's difficult to resolve: Which problems did the new school structure create, and which ones did it inherit? "There seems to be incredible amnesia in this community about what we had before," says Sarah Usdin, head of New Schools for New Orleans, a nonprofit teacher recruitment group. As has frequently been the case in New Orleans schools—which before Katrina cycled through superintendents at the rate of about one per year—leadership became a central issue. Following months of growing controversy over RSD school conditions and performance issues, the *Times-Picayune* called for RSD head Robin Jarvis to resign; she obliged in early May. The state tapped Philadelphia public schools superintendent Paul Vallas, whose first school year on the job will begin at the end of this summer.

The blossoming of new charter schools is frequently touted as the best hope for New Orleans. Still relatively young, charters were introduced in 1988 by American Federation of Teachers president Albert Shanker, who saw them as self-contained educational greenhouses for developing new ways of teaching. These innovations, he explained, could then be introduced districtwide. More recently, some advocates have argued that charters represent a superior way to run all public schools. Yet the results of national achievement tests have been inconclusive at best.

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Those wishing to forge ahead with a full-tilt charter revolution have also lacked a platform from which to launch their crusade. Then the floodwaters rose over New Orleans, sending some 65,000 public school students fleeing.

"This is the greenfield site that you never get in public education," says John Ayers, with the National Association of Charter School Authorizers, which contracted with the State of Louisiana to review groups that wished to open charter schools. Indeed, by the conclusion of the 2006–07 school year, more than 70 percent of the city's schools had become charter schools, far outpacing the rate in any other city.

The Bush Administration has been trumpeting the new schools as a New Orleans success story. In fact, charters were the Administration's second plan for New Orleans students. Immediately after the flood, Bush attempted a $500 million voucher program to allow displaced children to enroll in private and religious schools across the country. Critics saw the move as an attempt to exploit the disaster to finally enact vouchers, a longstanding Bush goal, and the initiative failed. There was no similar outcry when the US Department of Education pledged $44.8 million to Louisiana for post-Katrina charter schools. Yet the Administration left no doubt that the move was intended to quickly prop up charters: It offered no comparable funding to re-establish traditional neighborhood or district schools.

The appeal of charter schools to conservatives is evident: They introduce free-market competition into a traditional public institution.

In addition to the federal money, charter schools also have benefited from an outpouring of nonprofit and corporate dollars that is massive by New Orleans public school standards. This past year, the Baptist Community Ministries, the state's largest private foundation, pledged $4.2 million specifically to help charter schools. The Laura Bush Foundation's impressive effort to rebuild school libraries along the Gulf Coast hasn't yet included any RSD schools, although numerous private and charter schools in New Orleans have received grants of up to $75,000 each. This influx of money has arguably led to an even greater inequity among public schools. One example: In a flattering profile of a French Quarter charter school run by the national Knowledge Is Power Program (KIPP), *Forbes* magazine noted that thanks to corporate funding, the school can spend $1,500 more per student than it receives from federal and state funding. Donations to new KIPP schools in the city include $2 million from the Broad Education Foundation. "The most powerful foundations and wealthiest people are helping some schools succeed that conform to their vision of what schools should be," says Lance Hill. "It's an attempt to influence the outcomes of an experiment."

Although Bush makes infrequent trips to New Orleans—he left the struggles of the Gulf Coast out of his 2007 State of the Union address altogether—he never fails to use his appearances in the city to highlight the new schools. In March Bush stopped at Samuel J. Green Middle School, a well-regarded elementary school that had chartered before Katrina. "Charter schools, to me, say innovation, individuality," Bush declared before an audience of education leaders. Bush used his visit to the New Orleans school to lobby for the reauthorization of No Child Left Behind, touting its emphasis on testing: "You can't guess, particularly when it comes to the life of a child."

Guesswork is now a hallmark of New Orleans schools, say critics including Jesse Jackson, who has made frequent trips to New Orleans to organize around education, housing and voting rights. "The charter school movement is privatization, which undermines public education," Jackson says. "Charter schools for a few must not displace public education for all. The students of New Orleans should not be put in a position of being guinea pigs in an experiment."

The appeal of charter schools to conservatives is evident: Charters introduce free-market competition into a traditional public institution. In the language of many charter advocates, parents are consumers and charters are product providers. The more schools on the shelf, the more options for parent shoppers. The problems of public education in the United States, then, aren't about underfunded schools or overcrowded classrooms. The fault lies with the classic flaws of big government: bloated bureaucracy and political corruption. Charter schools undermine big government, clearing the way for efficiency and innovation.

That argument is especially resonant in New Orleans, where just this summer a former school board president admitted she took more than $100,000 in bribes for supporting a particular math program. Yet charter critics say that the competitive model is failing the city's most at-risk students and creating a system that is even more segregated than before. By selective admissions, parental contracts and grade requirements, charter schools are able to "cream" their students not just by race and class but also by levels of parental involvement. If a child doesn't have parents or guardians willing or able to navigate the sometimes labyrinthine path into a charter school, that child will join the other, less fortunate students in an RSD school. "Many in New Orleans now refer to the RSD schools as 'the dumping ground,'" writes Leigh Dingerson of the Center for Community Change. "Such a set of catch-all schools is *required* in a free market system, because there must be a place for the kids who don't gain entry elsewhere."

Yet Ayers, who calls charter schools "liberation strategies," says that there is a progressive argument to be made for charters. Organizations like KIPP are developing vital strategies in inner-city education, he says, and not all charter-school proponents in New Orleans and elsewhere support the President and his educational policies. "The charter movement is dominated in the trenches by progressives, even when we've been represented on the national stage by conservatives," he says. To those who argue that charters amount to privatization of a public institution because some chartering organizations are for-profit groups, he counters that much of public education—from textbooks to cleaning services—is already privatized.

In 2000 Jonathan Schorr argued in these pages that progressives should not write off charter schools, and that "liberals need not abdicate their place on the educational cutting edge, and ought not be seen as defenders of bureaucracy and failure." In-

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St. Augustine warned that it is dangerous for religious people to ignore science: "Many non-Christians are well versed in natural knowledge, so they can detect vast ignorance in such a Christian and laugh it to scorn."

On the other hand, Sir Isaac Newton freely discusses the attributes and activities of God in *Principia Mathematica,* which sets forth his theory of gravity and laws of motion.

These examples represent the traditional relationship of science and religion that is too often obscured by the divisive, hot-headed rhetoric and the gross oversimplifications we often see in today's headlines. Long before the shouting and the sloganeering, scientists and theologians have pursued a unity of truth, and most theologians have agreed with the advice of Galileo's colleague, Cardinal Baronio, that the Bible "tells us how to go to heaven, not how the heavens go."

Once we understand this, we have a new perspective on many present-day controversies. The current antievolution furor, for example, centers on the fixation that Genesis 1 should be taken literally, an issue that had been resolved by theologians long ago. Professor Principe deems it "astonishingly trivial," and shows how science gives theologians powerful tools for enriching, not contradicting, their understanding of ultimate truths.

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About Your Professor

Dr. Lawrence M. Principe is Professor of the History of Science and Technology, and Professor of Chemistry at Johns Hopkins University. He received a Ph.D. in Organic Chemistry from Indiana University and a Ph.D. in the History of Science from Johns Hopkins University. He has won several Johns Hopkins teaching awards and the 2004 Francis Bacon Prize from the California Institute of Technology.

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deed, among the most vocal champions of New Orleans charters have been the city's most prominent Democrats. Senator Mary Landrieu has called charter schools the backbone of the city's educational renaissance. The senator's aunt, Orleans Parish School Board president Phyllis Landrieu, was even more ecstatic about the changes. "I say, 'Thank you, Katrina,' all the time," she told *Time* magazine at the start of the 2006–07 school year.

As president of the United Teachers of New Orleans (UTNO), Brenda Mitchell is used to being called a defender of failure, and worse. "We've been painted as obstructionists, which is not the case," she says, speaking amid folding chairs, file cabinets and solidarity signs, and the sound of drills and hammers, in the union's temporary offices in New Orleans. "I've been told that the union is trying to run the schools. All we are saying is that we should work together on this."

Mitchell estimates the union's pre-Katrina membership at 4,700, and UTNO was the exclusive bargaining agent for another 2,000 school employees. The union now has about 500 members, she says, and is working on organizing inside charter schools.

Recruiting groups in New Orleans are steering the most qualified teachers to the city's charter schools, further deepening the quality gap.

Those responsible for reshaping New Orleans schools make no apologies for being anti-union. In written testimony before a US Senate subcommittee hearing in July 2006, Linda Johnson, president of the Louisiana Board of Elementary and Secondary Education, listed this item as a positive "unintended consequence" of the state takeover: "This structure was the only way to terminate…central office employees, eliminate the collective bargaining agreement and leverage the opportunity to start anew." Ayers, of the National Association of Charter School Authorizers, is more succinct: "In the urban setting, the unions add so little value, it's shocking."

Mitchell, for her part, contends that unions are valuable not only because they give teachers a voice in the workplace but because they help prevent the kind of troubles that the RSD has faced in the past school year. Jim Randels says he's seen this firsthand as a teacher at Douglass. The union contract insured that a school's heating system was checked before winter. This year, that didn't happen—and Randels says the school had to shut down temporarily when winter came and the heater didn't function.

In December 2005 the Orleans Parish School Board voted to fire all teachers and other school employees. Many veteran teachers left the city or took early retirement. Not surprisingly, chief among the problems that plagued RSD schools this past year was a teacher shortage. "Our teachers were forced to retire. They want to come back, but not under these conditions—not without a recognition agreement with United Teachers of New Orleans," says Linda Stelly, an associate director with the American Federation of Teachers.

New Schools for New Orleans head Sarah Usdin has worked alongside union officials on previous projects in New Orleans schools. "My bottom line is that unionized or not, we need the best teachers to get the best results with kids," Usdin says. Yet some charter critics argue that new teacher-recruiting groups such as New Schools for New Orleans and teachNOLA are steering the most qualified educators only into the charter school system, further deepening the quality gap between RSD schools and charters. For much of this past school year, a teachNOLA website offered visitors a chance to identify themselves as certified or uncertified teachers. Those who identified themselves as certified were sent to a site for charter schools; those who were uncertified were sent to a site for RSD schools. Usdin says that the distinction was an unintended result of contract structuring. The site no longer divides the potential teaching pool in the same manner.

Usdin stresses that she is interested in bringing new teachers into New Orleans, especially from "the diaspora"—former New Orleanians who left the city after Katrina. She's not interested, she says, in shuffling teachers from school to school. Yet competition among schools for teachers seems fierce in the new school marketplace. Outside an uptown restaurant this spring, I heard one preschool teacher complaining about the conditions in her charter school. A neighborhood activist immediately began recruiting her for a charter he was helping to establish. Randels says he's personally seen representatives from charter schools enter RSD schools to recruit teachers, and adds that teachers have left their classes in the middle of the semester to take other positions, further disrupting classrooms. "This is no longer democracy; it's capitalism," Randels charges.

That ethos now permeates New Orleans public schools. Hal Roark is a resident in Broadmoor—a mixed-race, mixed-income neighborhood that organized itself after learning that it had been slated by a city-planning group to be converted into green space. Broadmoor residents realized that the neighborhood's recovery depended on the establishment of a public school. After researching various national charter companies, residents contracted with the for-profit Edison Schools. Yet it has been unable to secure a site in the neighborhood—even though a nearby school building has been open and unsecured since the storm and has suffered heavy losses due to post-Katrina vandalism. At the same time, Roark notices a former parochial school in the neighborhood and wonders if another group could place a charter in that building, siphoning off his new school's students. "Remember, this is a competitive model," he says.

If so, it's not always a transparent one. Sheila Williams works with the Rainbow/PUSH Coalition in New Orleans; she recalls that she and others were working with families in the Guste Housing Project to open a nearby RSD school. After months of speaking with RSD officials and organizing families in the effort, she learned from state education officials that the building was going to a charter group. "They can make as many charters as they want, but they need to stop giving away all the buildings," she says.

Yet in the new New Orleans, the option to charter is often seen as necessary to getting a neighborhood back on its feet—nowhere more so than in the city's heavily damaged Lower Ninth Ward. Before Katrina, the neighborhood's Martin Luther King Elementary School was an Orleans public school success story. When the region flooded, residents violated official orders and worked with

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the Common Ground activist group to enter and clean the building. Neither the city nor the state, it seemed, had any interest in reopening the school. "The reality check is that the schools below Canal Street were X-ed off the map," says Cynthia Willard-Lewis, who represents the area on the City Council.

And so principal Doris Hicks, Willard-Lewis says, was given a choice between two "wrong" options: charter or go away. Hicks now appears in advertisements for New Schools for New Orleans that champion the autonomy of charter schools.

At a parade through the Lower Ninth this past Martin Luther King Jr. Day, the scene was of a community refusing to give up. Children from the Martin Luther King Charter School, temporarily located in an uptown New Orleans building, marched past flood-stained empty houses carrying signs that stated We Study and We Do Homework, while sweat streamed down the faces of brass band musicians who chanted, "We got fire!" National Guardsmen on patrol and Common Ground volunteers stopped their activities to watch as teachers climbed out of a pickup truck to dance in the street with students. The sign on the Martin Luther King school still had a pre-Katrina date: August 18, 2005. Hicks ran to a cooler to get sodas for students and teachers. "I used to not believe in charter schools," she admitted.

By the end of the school year, the Ninth Ward location for the Martin Luther King Charter School was reopened. Meanwhile, according to area graduation rates compiled by the *Times-Picayune* from RSD data, of the sixty-six seniors who started at Joseph T. Clark High School this past school year, fifty-eight remained. Of those, twenty-six students—just 39 percent—made it to graduation. ■

FACING A CRIME WAVE, THE CITY IS CRACKING DOWN ON NONVIOLENT OFFENDERS.

Locked Up in New Orleans

ROBIN TEMPLETON

"I never got paid," Dewitt Solomon tells me. Nine months before the levees broke, Solomon had a minimum-wage job busing tables and washing dishes at Messina's, a popular New Orleans tourist restaurant. But instead of paying him directly, Messina's gave Solomon's paychecks to the Orleans Parish Criminal Sheriff's Office. Solomon, who was serving time in the Orleans Parish Prison—the eighth largest penal institution in the country and the largest correctional facility in Louisiana before Hurricane Katrina—was enrolled in the sheriff's work-release program.

PETER O. ZIERLEIN

The prison was supposed to give him his wages, minus the $500 a month it deducted for room and board, the day it returned to Solomon his freedom. Solomon says that the sheriff still owes him $1,500.

Sitting at the kitchen table at his home in New Orleans's West Bank, Solomon and I are feeding bottles to his twin sons. The babies weighed less than two pounds at birth. Now, at 13 months, they're startlingly small but chugging away at the formula like they're in a race to catch up. Solomon's 5-year-old daughter is prancing around the room with a Dora the Explorer coloring book. She has proclaimed that the cartoon heroine is her twin sister. The resemblance is, actually, striking.

Solomon says he tried for months to recoup his lost earnings and never got a call back from the sheriff's office. He gave up after floodwater washed away his only proof, the pay stubs he'd saved from the restaurant.

Solomon sounds more resigned than bitter. "It's not that I couldn't still use the money," he says. "I'm just glad I got in and out before it got any worse." Solomon describes how his brother-in-law was arrested on trespassing charges when he went to check on storm damage to his father's home. His cousin was also arrested for a nonviolent crime weeks ago, and no one in the family has been able to make contact or even determine where he's being held.

New Orleans has the highest incarceration rate of any major US city—double the national rate. Louisiana also locks up more people in local jails than any state due in part to state laws, unheard of in other parts of the country, that paralyze due process.

District attorneys have sixty days from the time of arrest in a felony case and forty-five days in a misdemeanor case to decide whether to press charges and typically use the full statutory time limit. From there, it takes an average of three months for detainees to get a court date. It can take up to three years to get to trial. According to a recent study by the Vera Institute of Justice, 41 percent of those entering the Orleans Parish Prison would qualify to be released on their own recognizance. Instead, the city opts to lock people up if they can't post bail, which is true of three-quarters of the jail's detainees.

While it was bad before the storm, "now the system is only working to pick people up," says Loyola University law professor Bill Quigley. "It's a vacuum, sucking poor people in and keeping them in. Being arrested now equals being sent to prison."

Nearly a year after Katrina, the city's backlog of cases reached at least 6,000. Judge Arthur Hunter of the Orleans Parish Criminal District Court declared that "it is a pathetic and shameful state of affairs the criminal justice system finds itself in" and said that he would mark the one-year anniver-

Robin Templeton is a writer and nonprofit development consultant. A Louisiana native, she lives in Brooklyn, New York.

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sary of the storm by beginning to release poor defendants.

But just as Hunter was declaring a constitutional state of emergency last summer, New Orleans was hit by a devastating crime wave. With half its former population, the city saw its crime rate escalate back to pre-Katrina levels. By the time it was gearing up for its second post-Katrina Mardi Gras celebration, national media were pronouncing New Orleans the murder capital of the United States.

Under the headline "Dysfunction Fuels Cycle of Killing in New Orleans," the *New York Times* reported in February that a "uniquely poisoned set of circumstances" was fueling the violence, including the destruction of the city's only crime lab, friction between police and prosecutors, community distrust and fear of the police, uncooperative or vanished witnesses and "murderers' brutalized childhoods." The majority of victims and suspects have been young African-American men—many teenagers—caught up in a drug trade that was reinvigorated, reorganized and made more lethal amid turf wars in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina.

Arrestees report dungeonlike conditions: twenty-five in cells built for ten, no fresh air, overflowing toilets and iffy plumbing.

The crime crisis is part and parcel of a wider social crisis. Two years after the storm, only one-third of the childcare centers and 45 percent of the public schools in Orleans Parish have reopened. Mental health services for residents suffering from depression, drug addiction or post-traumatic stress disorder are practically nonexistent. The city's Housing Authority has slated thousands of units of public housing for demolition, the majority of which were not damaged by the storm.

Bill Quigley has represented hundreds of families fighting to reclaim their homes and possessions from the Housing Authority. "One of the reasons they say they don't want to reopen public housing is that they don't want to let crime back into the city," Quigley explains. "But crime is already back in. The truth is that there are a lot of young people here without their families. The families don't have housing. So kids are coming back on their own, without their aunts and their mothers and their grandparents. Neighborhoods are breaking down because we don't have the families back. We don't have a lot of the churches. We don't have the infrastructure in poor communities that we had before.

"Some of us in the city think it's a bigger crime to keep thousands of families out of their apartments than to sell drugs," he notes. "But law enforcement doesn't see it that way."

Indeed, city officials responded to the crime wave with a troop surge. The city's police department is nearly staffed back up to its pre-Katrina size and budgeted all the way back up. Local law enforcement has been joined by sixty state troopers and 300 National Guard troops in Humvees and military uniforms—they've christened themselves "Task Force Gator"—at a cost to the state of $35 million.

Police have been making a record number of arrests, now averaging over 1,300 a week. But as the crime problem persists, they don't seem to be getting the bad guys. According to recent exit interviews with detainees leaving the parish jail, conducted by the local criminal justice reform organization Safe Streets/Strong Communities, 80 percent were being held for nonviolent offenses, mostly on low-level drug or alcohol charges. "The city is plagued by violent crime, residents who will never be charged with a crime spend weeks in jail," the Vera Institute recently reported, "and some serious offenders are released with no charges."

Ursula Price, Safe Streets's outreach and investigations coordinator, describes the case of a woman in the jail "who had called 911 about a domestic violence incident. Instead of trying to help her, the police ran her name and ended up arresting her on an outstanding traffic violation."

Safe Streets provides first responders to the city's incarcerated. The group has racked up huge phone bills accepting collect calls from the Orleans Parish Prison and the diaspora of correctional facilities to which arrestees were scattered in the wake of the storm. Some callers just want to know why they're there—it can take days for police, whom one criminal defense lawyer described as "functionally illiterate," to complete a report. Others wonder how long they might be in, whether they have a court date, how they can get legal support or how they can contact their family or boss.

Callers from Orleans Parish Prison also report dungeonlike conditions: twenty-five people held in cells built for ten, so many people sleeping in one area that you can't even see the floor, no fresh or conditioned air, overflowing toilets, inconsistent electricity and iffy plumbing. The prison has yet to regain the accreditation it lost in the wake of Hurricane Katrina, when hundreds of inmates were abandoned in fetid floodwaters in what local writer and criminal defense attorney Billy Sothern described as "the biggest prison crisis since Attica" [see "Left to Die," January 2, 2006].

This summer Glenn Thomas, the 29-year-old son of Rosetta James, a member of Safe Streets/Strong Communities, died in Orleans Parish Prison. James didn't learn of her son's death from the sheriff's office, she says, but by word of mouth: "One of the inmates was able to call his mother and tell her that Glenn had died, and she came and found me. I said, 'Nobody tell me nothing. I'm going to the jail.'" When she got there, the morning of July 4, James was told that her son, who had no known medical problems, had died the night before at 11 PM of "natural causes," and that she could call back in another month for the official report.

Thomas died waiting for his day in court. On May 19, 2004, he was arrested for simple drug possession. He was slated to appear in court about a year later, on August 31, 2005, when the city was uninhabitable. Nonetheless, a warrant was issued for his arrest for failing to appear. In October 2006, Thomas was arrested and detained in the Orleans Parish Prison. His new court date, the one he didn't live to see, was set for August 2007.

Criminal Sheriff Marlin Gusman's public information officer, Renee Lapeyrolerie, said they couldn't provide details about Thomas's death but said, "Well, in his criminal history he had a lot of drug arrests. Those things can be linked to health problems."

"This is the third death there's been in there this year," says Safe Streets co-director Norris Henderson. "It's all the same

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story. The jail says they don't know why any of these people died. Anything wrong that happens in his facilities the sheriff blames on the inmates or on not having enough money," Henderson says. "But you really can't blame Glenn for his own death, and you can't blame it on the money, because he's got that."

As mandated by a 35-year-old consent decree intended to remedy abusive conditions in the jail, the city pays the Orleans Parish Criminal Sheriff's Office a per diem amount for each local inmate, plus $3.2 million annually to provide medical services. In his 2007 budget request to the City Council, Gusman asked for an additional $5 million for medical services, a request that was granted.

Henderson is solemn when asked what it will take to get public officials to pay attention to the crisis. "It's not like I want a Rodney King situation where people burn the city down, because we don't have much of a city left to burn. But we need to do something, a sit-down, a walkout, something. It's getting to the point where we need some drama."

Dana Kaplan of the Center for Constitutional Rights summarizes the essential problem facing reformers. "Right now Gusman's funding is tied to the number of the people in the jail. How are we going to get money for schools and services and jobs programs with so much money tied up in the jail?"

Gusman's recent budget requests make it clear that he is banking on crime. His 2007 "budget request for these payments is based on our expected City inmate population," the sheriff wrote to the City Council. "The inmate population is driven primarily by the number of arrests made by the Police Department. Since the storm, the arrest rate has consistently increased in an attempt to stem the rising crime rate." In his 2005 request, Gusman explained that the depopulation of the jail in the immediate wake of Katrina represented a "90 percent reduction in revenue, but our fixed costs remain high."

Gusman has never publicly said that his aim is to build Orleans Parish Prison, which can now accommodate 2,500 inmates, back up to its former size, which was 8,000 before Katrina. But in written testimony to the US House of Representatives in April 2007, he listed as chief among his critical needs "the restoration of our four largest jail facilities." This, Gusman wrote, "would increase our capacity (an additional 4,100 beds) to hold some of New Orleans [*sic*] most violent and repeat offenders."

In other words, "build them and fill them," says Henderson, "and we know who'll be filling them."

Henderson and other local advocates formed Safe Streets/Strong Communities in the wake of Katrina, in the words of their founding statement, "to demand that elected officials address the root causes of our decades-long public safety crisis, cease blaming the victims, and stop investing time and money on tactics that have never worked.... Many of our children have been given nothing to reach for except guns and little to own and be proud of but their street corners."

While Safe Streets has scored some recent victories—helping win the appointment of a new Indigent Defender Board and funding to launch the Office of the Independent Monitor to over-

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As of 7.31.07	1-YR	3-YRS	5-YRS	10-YRS
Citizens Value Fund	17.50	13.97	14.26	6.58
S&P 500 Index	16.13	11.76	11.81	5.98
As of 6.30.07	1-YR	3-YRS	5-YRS	10-YRS
Citizens Value Fund	20.70	13.53	11.96	7.87
S&P 500 Index	20.59	11.68	10.71	7.13

Gross Expense Ratio 1.62% / Net Expense Ratio 1.29% as of 6.30.06

Data presented reflects past performance, which is no guarantee of future results. Current performance may be lower or higher than the performance data quoted. Performance data current to the most recent month end may be obtained online at www.citizensfunds.com. Performance data includes that of the Meyers Pride Value Fund, the fund's predecessor, which contributed its portfolio securities in exchange for Standard shares of Citizens Value Fund on September 24, 2001. Investment return and principal value of an investment will fluctuate so that an investor's shares, when redeemed, may be worth more or less than their original cost. The investment adviser has agreed to limit fees and expenses, without which returns would have been lower. The S&P 500 Index is an unmanaged broad-based stock index comprised of 500 of the most widely held U.S. companies. Direct investment cannot be made in this index. ***Please consider the investment objectives, risks, charges and expenses of Citizens Funds carefully before investing. For this and other information, please call 800.223.7010 or visit www.citizensfunds.com for a free prospectus and read it carefully before investing.***
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see police policies and practices, for instance—the real challenge for activists is the fight to reallocate public resources, out of law and order and into community recovery.

But to Sheriff Gusman, these are one and the same; he has made sure that the city's path to recovery will be paved by his inmates—literally. Since Katrina, Gusman has used his Community Service Program and Neighborhood Response Team to deliver cheap labor for reconstruction projects. His office's website features photos of inmates in orange jumpers and sweatshirts emblazoned with SHERIFF GUSMAN COMMUNITY SERVICE PROGRAM next to road signs announcing, PROJECT CLEAN-UP. INMATES WORKING.

It's not so far from the way things were more than a century ago. Antebellum city records refer to what is now the Orleans Parish Prison as the Workhouse. In addition to those arrested for crime, the jail was a repository for slaves whose masters chose to lease them to the Workhouse. The same archives also reveal that African-Americans were committed to the Workhouse for "claiming to be free": In the space where the master's name was usually recorded, these inmates were referred to as "so-called free." After the 1863 Emancipation Proclamation, African-Americans arrested in New Orleans for black-code crimes like vagrancy and unemployment were taken to the parish Workhouse. During Reconstruction, the incarcerated former slaves provided a critical pool of forced labor for railroad companies, agriculture and industry.

In its first regular session post-Katrina, the state legislature amended a law regulating parish jail labor in order to grant immunity to prison authorities "for injuries or damages caused or suffered by prisoners participating in any work program during incarceration at parish jail facilities." When I asked a legislative staffer about the origins of the post-Katrina amendment, she said, "I believe it was because there was a labor shortage."

Lieut. Eric Donnelly, director of the sheriff's work-release program, the one that Dewitt Solomon took part in before the storm, told a local business paper that the program played a vital role in restarting the city's economic engine. "As soon as the hurricane ended and we got a new phone, it was ringing off the hook from employers saying they needed their inmates," Donnelly said. "So as soon as we were getting them back in we had [employers] coming to pick them up themselves. That's how much they rely on this program."

But, as Solomon says, "you shouldn't have to go to jail to get a job." ■

A SPECTER WAS HAUNTING THE PARTY'S TRADITIONAL POLL THIS YEAR: THE IRAQ WAR.

GOP Clutches at Iowa Straws

MARC COOPER

Ames, Iowa

On the day before the recent GOP straw poll, most of the Republican presidential candidates cruised the fabled Iowa State Fair grounds, competing for attention among the vendors hawking pork-chops-on-a-stick, deep-fried Twinkies, pickle dawgs and funnel cakes under a sweltering late-summer sun. Taking refuge inside the air-conditioned Varied Industries Building, and squeezed among displays of tractors, sewing machines, ATVs and portable oxygen tanks, former House Speaker Newt Gingrich was doing some hawking of his own, autographing copies of his new novel about Pearl Harbor.

PETER O. ZIERLEIN

Since the crowds were more attracted to a free pull on a slot machine at a nearby booth, Newt was more than happy to chat about the current election environment—though "happy" would not be the most precise descriptor. More like glum. "The country is so very unhappy with this Administration," Gingrich said, "that if the Republican candidates stay within the current pattern, it's going to be very, very tough. They're going to have to learn from [French President] Sarkozy and make a clean break from the past, or else they're going to be in a world of trouble."

When asked what he meant by clean break, Newt punted, inviting me to find the answers during a series of workshops he would be sponsoring the next day at the Ames straw poll. Gingrich's pessimism about the immediate Republican future was readily confirmed during the poll—and not just by the sparse turnout for his seminars but by the outcome of the circus-like straw poll, which is held whenever a Republican incumbent isn't running for re-election.

Sure, it's easy to mock the poll: The Republican faithful are bused to the Iowa State University campus from all over the state by the candidates, or else lured by the sprawl of campaign tents serving barbecue, live music, games for the kiddies and a three-hour gabfest of candidate speeches—and, for a mere $35 (often paid for by one of the campaigns), the right to "vote" for the one you like. Even right-wing radio host Laura Ingraham, who served as this year's host of the candidates' forum, called the straw poll "Iowa's version of *American Idol*."

Top candidates like George W. Bush, who won eight years ago, and this year's victor, Mitt Romney, spend enormous sums of money on the show, erecting huge tents and stages, hiring dozens of buses, carting in tons of food and—in Romney's case—providing a fleet of golf carts and wheelchairs to ferry

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voters from the parking lots to the food lines to the voting lines. (Kansas Senator Sam Brownback, who placed third, had his campaign staffers check to make sure people had voted before allowing them into his "free" food lines.)

But for all its tinfoil folly, the poll—often contrary to the wishes of its Iowa organizers—can reveal much more than just which candidate has the best organization and therefore the leg up on Iowa's first-in-the-nation caucuses, now only four months away. The breakneck acceleration of the primary season, with as much as half the electorate now scheduled to vote by February 5, has robbed Iowa of some of its glamour. But only some—candidates of both parties are reticent to write off the Hawkeye State. And some, like Romney on the GOP side and Edwards for the Democrats, see Iowa as a veritable make-or-break battleground.

"This was a full-body workout for our organization and tells you a lot about our breadth and depth," boasted Romney's Iowa press secretary, Tim Albrecht. "If so many people are willing to come across the state in the heat of the summer to vote for Mitt, they're certainly going to do the same at the local school or church come the caucuses."

It's remarkable how far to the right one finds the center of gravity nowadays at GOP events like the straw poll.

That's the good news, for Romney at least. The bad news is that the straw poll also offered a rather penetrating glimpse into the crisis of today's Republican Party, the disenchantment among its base and the weakness of its presidential contenders. That picture is anything but "full-bodied."

Romney, who took first with 32 percent of the votes, garnered almost the same percentage as Bush in 1999, but with two important differences: Bush vanquished some well-funded heavy contenders, including Elizabeth Dole and Lamar Alexander. By contrast, Romney faced no challenge from the other top-tier candidates—Rudy Giuliani and John McCain and the still undeclared Fred Thompson, all of whom decided not to compete in the poll. Bagging Duncan Hunter isn't quite the same as Bush's toppling of Liddy Dole in 1999.

The other important difference is that turnout for this year's event plummeted to 14,000 voters, down from 24,000 in 1999, marking an undeniable lethargy among the GOP base. Further, Romney's haul is less than the number of Iowa Republican voters that some independent polls show as undecided or dissatisfied with *all* the candidates. "Yes, you can say Romney won the straw poll," says California-based GOP consultant Allan Hoffenblum. "You can just as easily say that 68 percent of Republicans voted against him."

In a moment of off-the-record candor, a top adviser to Iowa Senator Chuck Grassley confessed to the malaise affecting his fellow Republicans and undermining Romney's win: "Never before have so many people come to this poll and—regardless of how they actually voted—had so much indecision in their hearts." The 800-pound chunk of stinking cheese in the room, he said, was the Iraq War. "Our people are confused, very confused. They want to support the Commander in Chief, they want to support the war, but they can't see any results and are appalled by the way the war has been conducted," he said, surveying the crowd that had come to hear the candidates' speeches. "Don't let anyone tell you otherwise—probably a third and more likely half these folks are undecided, and nothing here today is going to change that." Senator Grassley also agreed that the war was fogging up Republican chances. "No doubt the cloud of Iraq is a serious problem," he told *The Nation*. "Will it still be a year from now? Hopefully not. Hopefully, General Petraeus's cavalry will ride into victory."

Such blind hope was common among the candidates. The eight who participated sounded near-identical notes in supporting the war, except for the fringe maverick and pro-peace Representative Ron Paul (more about him below). Brownback promoted one wrinkle: a soft-partition plan quite similar to that of Democratic contender Joseph Biden.

Romney was the most "continuist" of the candidates, suggesting not a crack of daylight between him and Bush on Iraq or the "war on terror." "We have to thank the President for keeping us safe for the last six years," Romney said as his supporters hoisted posters with the slogan A Surge in Support for Our Troops. At the straw poll and in numerous campaign events preceding it, Romney hammered away at the theme of strength. "A stronger military, a stronger economy, stronger families and a stronger America," went his refrain.

Romney's other main pitch—one repeated almost robotically at every venue available to him—was change. "What brought us here is that change begins in Iowa and change begins today!" he thundered. The word must have popped up a dozen times in his ten-minute address. But it was hard to discern how he would change Bush's policies. Even some of Romney's most prominent supporters shrugged when asked what he means. "I can't really tell you what the Governor means by that," said Iowa House minority leader and Romney endorser Christopher Rants, laughing. "I'm starting to hear some subtle shifts from him on the war, but it's subtle. I'm out fundraising now all the time, and everywhere I go—and I'm talking about from our own people—every conversation begins with me having to sit through ten minutes of complaints about the White House and our national party."

With Giuliani, McCain and Thompson not competing and the Romney campaign pouring so much money into the poll effort, the only real suspense was over who would take second and, in so doing, consolidate Iowa's large religious conservative base—and perhaps the nation's. Former Arkansas Governor Mike Huckabee (18 percent) edged out Brownback (15 percent), an impressive showing when you consider that while Brownback spent lavishly, Huckabee didn't rent as much as a single bus. He won the hard way—by intense ground-level campaigning and strong personal appeals.

You couldn't find two candidates with more divergent styles. Brownback stands on that old-time religion, pounding away at family values. Unless you're already a card-carrying Bible-thumper, he has no appeal. Huckabee, by sharp contrast, has the soft and rather comforting tone of the Southern Baptist preacher he once was. He sounds like what a compassionate conservative really ought to sound like: He's neither threatening nor polarizing, and he doesn't demonize nonbelievers—or even Democrats.

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He's all about a social gospel that at least *sounds* good. His style is straightforward, calm, usually reasonable and, yes, charismatic. (But note that he was one of the guys who raised their hands when asked in a recent GOP debate who doesn't believe in evolution.)

Huckabee doesn't shy away from talking about improving the environment, expanding healthcare or fighting corporate corruption. "I'm not afraid of talking about obscene drug company profits, nor about the outrage of CEOs earning 500 times what a worker does," Huckabee told me at the state fair. "It's important we do so, because too often we Republicans sound like a wholly owned affiliate of Wall Street. America was not made great by greed." He also strongly supports music and arts education.

Huckabee, with his inclusive, unbridled optimism, was a dramatic counterpoint to the other candidates. It's remarkable how far to the right one finds the center of gravity nowadays at GOP events like the straw poll. Every candidate endorsed an extension of the wall across the Southern US border, a regressive flat tax, repeal of *Roe v. Wade*, support for the NRA and at least partial privatization of Social Security. Romney and his family appeared onstage as if they had just stepped out of a Ralph Lauren magazine spread, looking as preppy and wholesome as the national croquet team. But that didn't keep Romney from celebrating what is politely called the "rough interrogation" techniques used at Guantánamo and secret CIA prisons.

The frankly xenophobic Tom Tancredo and cult militarist Duncan Hunter entered into stiff competition for the title of Prince of Darkness.

The lesser candidates were even less restrained, having much less to lose. The frankly xenophobic Representative Tom Tancredo and cult militarist Representative Duncan Hunter entered into stiff competition for the title of Prince of Darkness. Hunter comes off as a constipated drill sergeant, claiming he will extend the current border wall from fifty-nine miles long to nearly 900 within six months of taking the office he stands no chance of winning. Tancredo, who brought along his "Tom's Army Against Amnesty," railed against illegal immigrants, warning, finally, "This is our culture!" He also chided the Bush Administration for being too soft in the war on terror, denouncing what he called the "multicultural rules of engagement" set by the Pentagon. "In a Tancredo administration," he exclaimed to an ear-splitting ovation, "there will be only one rule of engagement: We win—you lose!"

Former Wisconsin Governor and Health and Human Services Secretary Tommy Thompson seemed to have no raison d'être for a lame campaign he folded within hours of his humiliating sixth-place finish. The most spirited contingent was undoubtedly that of Texas Representative Ron Paul, some of whose supporters donned three-cornered hats and marched in a fife and drum corps. Paul finished with 9 percent of the vote, considerably less than what some of his more optimistic supporters had predicted would be an Internet-fueled "revolution." A semi-libertarian who opposes the war in Iraq, Paul has received across-the-aisle admiration from some antiwar progressives. But they should listen more closely to his message: He wants to abolish the IRS and all federal taxation, the Education Department and all government safety nets ("an end to the warfare and welfare" state, as he puts it). He wants to repeal the "horrific" *Roe v. Wade*, and he made the rather mind-numbing claim that 9/11 might have been prevented if the government hadn't had the monopoly on deciding who could bring guns onto airplanes.

Throw in the straw poll's warm-up speaker, Wayne LaPierre of the NRA, who showed a video of "local tyrants" who allegedly want to confiscate all your guns (all of them happened to be black elected officials), and the bigger picture comes into rather sharp relief. Those who track presidential politics should not be surprised that such pre-primary events bring out the most fervent in both parties. But the looming question is how any of the Republican candidates will be able to make a successful transition to general election mode and cast a wider net.

Compounding the problem is the difficulty of assessing the importance of early-voting states like Iowa, and extrapolating the greater significance of Romney's win in the straw poll. Is it even worth playing to a true-believer audience of the sort the Iowa GOP can assemble? In the past, Iowa and New Hampshire have served as strategic catapults for national campaigns; some Republicans, like Iowa House minority leader Chris Rants, think that's still true. "Giuliani and McCain made a big mistake by not coming to the straw poll," said Rants. "Their skipping it certainly doesn't build the sort of goodwill they will need coming into and leaving from Iowa next year." Indeed, within days of the poll, Iowa was invaded not only by McCain, Giuliani and Fred Thompson but also by the entire field of Democratic candidates. Hillary Clinton and Giuliani nearly collided at the state fair. And Thompson, showing up two days later, forgot to change out of his Gucci loafers.

But some GOP strategists, like Allan Hoffenblum, insist that the candidates who skipped this year's straw poll will pay little price. In a national Gallup poll published a few days later, Romney was still in third place with 14 percent, trailing Fred Thompson at 19 percent and Giuliani at 32 percent. Pandering to the ultra-conservative base of small-state voters, says Hoffenblum, has been rendered obsolete now that more moderate big states like California and New York are voting early. "With the exception of Giuliani," Hoffenblum said, "all the Republican candidates running under the old logic have moved so far to the right, trying to appeal to the so-called base voters—especially on the immigration issue and just when the Latino vote will be imperative—that there is no easy way they can get any crossover votes come November [2008]. I can easily envision a Democratic landslide equal to 1964."

Some anecdotal evidence of Hoffenblum's fears materialized during the week of the straw poll. Des Moines broadcast outlet WHO-TV set up its own unscientific survey. As Iowa State Fair goers filed past the station booth, they had the option—not for $35 but for free—to vote for the candidate of their choice by dropping a kernel of Iowa corn into a jar bearing the picture of their favorite contender. The final results: Democrats, with Clinton at 33 percent and Edwards at 28 percent, gathered a total of 21,438 votes. Republicans, with Romney at 36 percent and Huckabee at 17 percent, collected a total of just over 14,000 votes. A veritable cornfed landslide. ■

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SHUNNING CORPORATE FOOD, LOCALVORES FIGHT GLOBAL WARMING AND EAT WELL.

The Hundred-Mile Diet

CHRISTOPHER KETCHAM

It's a pitiful thing to contemplate: By my estimation, close to 85 percent, perhaps even 95 percent, of the food that feeds my hometown of Moab, Utah, population 5,000, gets trucked or flown in over the red-rock desert, often from continental distances. Cut off that supply line—an absurd, wasteful and polluting operation where the average morsel travels 1,500 miles from farm to plate—and the city would starve to death in a week.

PETER O. ZIERLEIN

Eighty years ago Moab fed itself. The locals ate beef from cattle that grazed in the cool of the nearby mountains in summer or on the warm canyon floors in winter, where the townspeople also tended melons, peaches, nectarines, tomatoes, onions, potatoes, romaine lettuce and much else. The last of the old melon orchards are gone, bulldozed to make way for condo sprawl named after the destroyed gardens—a classic pattern that holds even for big cities. Among these is Washington, DC, where as recently as the 1950s most residents got their produce from Maryland farms next door that are now subdivisions of tarmac and drywall.

A few of my fellow Moabites balk at this foolery and plant their own gardens to take advantage of the desert sun. Jon Olschewski, who is 29 and pays his rent waiting tables at one of Moab's restaurants, where the food tastes like salted rubber, gets up to 70 percent of his family's diet from his 2.5-acre farm, depending on the season. He and his father, a stonemason, tend twenty-three types of fruit and vegetable and herb—melons, kohlrabi, cilantro, squash, edamame, garlic, dill, chocolate peppers—and cull the eggs of as many as ten chickens a season. "In the first half of the twentieth century, a semi truck of fruit rolled out of Moab every day," Olschewski tells me. "Out of acres and acres of orchards. Under 5 percent are still here. This town has turned a blind eye to its agricultural roots. And it's something that nobody wants to talk about." He likes to quote Eliot Coleman, author of *The New Organic Grower*, who notes that an average 2.5-acre farm suffices to provide enough produce for 100 locals for a year.

In an era when transcontinental food consumption has exploded—the value of international food trade is up threefold since 1960, the tonnage of food shipped between nations up fourfold (while population has only doubled)—Olschewski and his ilk are a beleaguered minority, to be sure. But their numbers across the nation are growing. They even have a name: They call themselves localvores. The term is the invention of a group of Northern Californians who on the occasion of World Environmental Day in the summer of 2005 saw an opportunity to fight global warming by eating only from their Bay Area "foodshed," defined as foods sourced within 100 miles of one's doorstep. Thus was born Locavores.com and the annual Eat Local Challenge, which has flowered into a nationwide movement that asks participants to spend several months out of the year confined to the "hundred-mile diet." *Gourmet* magazine, in an article by activist-author Bill McKibben, has featured the pleasures and challenges of localvorism, while alt-supermarket chain Whole Foods now dedicates shelf space to delectables identified as "locally grown." Novelist Barbara Kingsolver this spring published *Animal, Vegetable, Miracle*, a memoir—eleven weeks on the *New York Times* bestseller list—that chronicles a year of eating locally after she and her husband fled the deserts of the Southwest for the farms of Virginia. "Our highest shopping goal," Kingsolver writes, "was to get our food from so close to home that we'd know the person who grew it."

Kingsolver was inspired to engage in this all-consuming experiment by the same concern that drove the pioneer localvores in California: Transcontinental foodism is destructive, unsustainable, irrational. According to the Worldwatch Institute, an imported long-distance meal of typical value—meat, grain, fruits, vegetables—consumes up to four times as much energy and produces four times as much greenhouse gas emissions as the locally grown equivalent. In 2002 food transportation was among the largest and fastest-growing sources of British greenhouse gas emissions. Meanwhile, trade studies in Britain find that the British import huge quantities of staples such as milk, pork and lamb, while exporting comparable tonnages of these same products—trapped in lunatic "food swap" trade agreements made possible by cheap oil, subsidized transport and centralized purchases by massive retailers. Perhaps localvorism is best understood as an act of rebellion against a system that should not—cannot—stand.

The one state in the union that appears most inclined to cut itself off from the industrial food pipeline is Vermont. A recent study by a graduate student at the University of Vermont found that the state leads the nation in localized movement of agricultural goods, with the highest per capita direct sales of farmers' products—1.2 percent—among the fifty states. Less than 2 percent is not a lot, of course, but it's a start. With this in mind, last winter 133 Vermonters in the Mad River Valley, accompanied by scores of others in five separate localvore "chapters" statewide, joined to exploit their state's market advantage in the so-called Winter Challenge. The Challenge required that participants survive only on a 100-mile foodshed for up to a week in cold February. Robin McDermott, who moved to Vermont with

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her husband three years ago and co-founded the Mad River Valley Localvores chapter in 2006, is somewhat harder on herself: Her challenge lasts all year.

By early summer, McDermott is planning six months of survival, from the first snows of September until the April melt. She cans, dries, cellars, preserves or freezes almost all of what she eats—her cellar stocked with carrots and potatoes, onions and beets; her freezer stocked with half a pig and half a lamb and many chickens, because "we know it is no fun for a farmer to slaughter chickens in the middle of the winter."

McDermott is unalloyed in her enthusiasm for the payoff in all this effort. If pipeline food promotes a kind of roboticism and mindlessness—every food always at hand, strawberries blooming in the aisles in icy January, the beef perfect in T-bones and strips always fresh—she believes that localvorism promotes intelligence, discretion and choice that go hand in hand with a recognition of limits. Consider the problem of asparagus. "There is a short period during the year, maybe three weeks, when I can get asparagus," McDermott tells me. "You can bet that I know when asparagus time is. I also know when strawberries, peas, spinach, tomatoes and corn will be available, and I plan for them."

There are two other big payoffs: one healthwise, the other as a stand for economic freedom. First, pipeline food is often polluted with additives, preservatives, pesticides and, not least, the germs of the many human hands and environments through which it passes (the latter most evident in the recent rash of Chinese food scandals—toxic fish, filthy shrimp, contaminated pet food). Second, if there's one big winner in the absurdist world-food supply line, it's large corporations that don't care about local economies. Just five companies control 75 percent of the global vegetable seed market; a handful of transnational companies control 90 percent of the trade in coffee and cocoa; five retailers account for 50 percent of all food purchases in France, Germany and Britain; the ur-predator among corporate retailers, Wal-Mart, is now the largest food retailer in the country.

On the other hand, if Vermonters shifted 10 percent of their food purchases to locally grown products, it would add more than $100 million to the state economy. Part of this added benefit is the infrastructure that arises to grow, process and distribute food (packinghouses, slaughterhouses, dairies, canneries). A study by the London-based New Economics Foundation concludes that food that stays local generates nearly twice as much income for the local economy as food exported or imported.

This spring I met two hippie vegetarians, Buck Butcher and Greg Marchand, as they wandered the West in a pickup chasing indigenous plants to eat (pinyon nuts in the high deserts of Nevada; strawberries, raspberries, currants in southern Montana). During the previous winter, in the hills of Tennessee, the two men culled at least half of their diet foraging in the richness of the temperate woods. Within a mile of their home—a notable 1/100th of the localvore limit—they gathered oyster mushrooms, watercress, wintercress, wild onions and Jerusalem artichokes. They roasted breadroots in olive oil with salt and pepper or boiled and mashed them like potatoes. "That was 50 percent of the time," said Buck. "The rest of the time we ate pizza."

Granted, most Americans have neither the leisure nor desire to wander the woods pulling roots, nor the skill and time to sow or kill their protein. We are bound to the diet that's most accessible—fast food, TV dinners, the wilted things at the supermarket—because of pressures of rent, work and children and, most important, because that's what the big food distributors make available. "I don't see this as an all-or-nothing proposition," says food scholar Michael Pollan, author of *The Omnivore's Dilemma*, which devotes a chapter to localvorism. "Trade in food goes back thousands of years. It's not inherently evil, but we're trading too much. I can't see us going all the way back to local or even regional food production. But we can try to move in that direction, and the localvores are teaching us that. They're also teaching us how hard it is to go back." ■

LETTERS
CONTINUED

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from Arcata said it was sending a sister-city delegation to Falluja, that would mean something. Sister-city programs can add up to something serious, which is why mainstream Jewish organizations go crazy every time people in Madison, Wisconsin, or Olympia, Washington, try to set up official ties with Rafah, in Gaza.

Both Bennis and Katha Pollitt are outraged by Lawrence McGuire's remarks about the Iraqi resistance, but what he wrote was on the money. Isn't it the ultimate in cynicism to use the Iraqi resistance's successes as a stick with which to beat George Bush and the Republicans but not the Democrats, while simultaneously saying you'd rather not think about the resistance because it seems Not Very Nice? If you are too scared to look, you'll never find out anything. In mid-July important Sunni-led insurgent organizations gathered in Damascus to prepare a negotiating position in advance of US withdrawal. Leaders of three of the groups met with Seumas Milne of the British *Guardian* and denounced Al Qaeda, sectarian killings and suicide bombings against civilians. You can either try to inform yourself of what the Iraqi resistance is doing, or you can take the route Pollitt did when she hysterically stigmatized the resistance as composed of "theocrats, ethnic nationalists, die-hard Baathists, jihadis, kidnappers, beheaders and thugs." How come she forgot to add "raghead"? I guess it wasn't PC. ALEXANDER COCKBURN

THE NEPAL CONNECTION

Katmandu, Nepal

■ Thanks for Ramachandra Guha's "A War in the Heart of India" [July 16/23]. Perhaps it took a foreign publication to discuss this frankly, as Guha does so well. The Indian urban press evidently does not wish to disturb corporate or government figures. From what I've gathered, the Salwa Judum is a government-sponsored force that's co-opting desperate villagers in order to clear the forest areas of Maoists and tribals and open the areas up for "development." The government will then ghettoize the tribals like Native Americans and exploit the valuable forest reserves. I had always hoped Indians would learn from American history, but I'm afraid they've learned all the wrong things.

The resemblance to the Maoist situation in Nepal is striking. Maoists paid attention to the situations the big-city politicians ignored. And despite their championing of Adivasis, the Naxal leadership, like that of the Maoists, is solidly Bahun-Chhetri (Brahmin-Kshatriya). So much for social change. But the Indian Naxals need not worry about Nepali Maoists having "sold out" by "giving up weapons." All they've really done is lock up the worthless arms and stash the good stuff elsewhere. You heard it here first.

CAROLINE MARTIN

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Donald Rumsfeld with Saddam Hussein, 1983

GETTY IMAGES

An Inconvenient Truth

ANDREW COCKBURN

A POISONOUS AFFAIR: America, Iraq, and the Gassing of Halabja.
By Joost R. Hiltermann.
Cambridge. 314 pp. $29.

If the United States ever possessed a shred of moral authority for the invasion of Iraq, it came from Halabja, a Kurdish town of about 70,000 people nestling in a bowl in front of the towering mountain chain that fringes Iraq's northeast frontier with Iran. Halabja was once famous among Kurds as the "city of poets," and the townspeople were known for their love of books. It is doubtful that George W. Bush had ever heard of the poets, but he did find it useful to know that in 1988 Halabjans were the victims of the largest use of chemical weapons against a civilian population in history, thereby providing inspiration for Bush's repeated observation that Saddam was "evil" and had "gassed his own people."

Like Guernica or My Lai, Halabja (in Kurdish, "the wrong place") suffered an experience of mass murder intense enough to transform the town's very name into a historical event. That event occurred on the afternoon of March 16, 1988—a cold but pleasant day, with occasional showers, notes Joost Hiltermann in *A Poisonous Affair*, his comprehensive and powerful delineation not only of what happened that day but of all those who helped bring it about. The day before, Kurdish fighters, with Iranian encouragement and support, had occupied the town after driving out Iraqi government troops. Now the Iraqi air force had returned to deliver Saddam's response.

According to survivors, mustard and nerve gas bombs that rained down on the town and its outskirts did not sound like conventional explosives when they detonated but instead gave off a deceptively mild noise, "more like a 'tap,'" as one witness put it. A report from Human Rights Watch described how "dead bodies—human and animal—littered the streets,

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huddled in doorways, slumped over the steering wheels of their cars. Survivors stumbled around, laughing hysterically, before collapsing.... Those who had been directly exposed to the gas found that their symptoms worsened as the night wore on. Many children died along the way and were abandoned where they fell."

A large number of people perished in their cellars, where they had taken refuge from anticipated Iraqi artillery barrages. Many more were killed as they fled from town, pursued by the lethal vapors. On a 2005 visit to the area, I sat on one of the grassy mounds that line the roads out of town, not realizing that these marked where groups of terrified escapees had fallen and been hastily covered with dirt.

Abbas Abd-al-Razzaq Akbar, the cameraman who recorded the first images of the slaughter, recalled to Hiltermann, "The gas had killed all natural life.... I couldn't hear anything. No birds. There was absolutely no sound.... The silence drove me crazy."

In September 2003, Secretary of State Colin Powell descended on the town to inaugurate a newly completed museum commemorating the 5,000 victims, making emotional reference to the "choking mothers [who] died holding their choking babies to their chests." Inside, tasteful displays featured dioramas of huddled corpses and other evocative memorabilia, including the empty casings of mustard and nerve gas bombs now painted up in bright colors.

"If you want evidence of the existence and use of weapons of mass destruction," Powell exhorted the press as he was leaving, "come here now to Halabja, look today and see it." Farther south, US military search teams were fruitlessly scouring the land for more contemporary evidence of WMDs. As usual, the people of Halabja, dead or alive, were being pressed into service on behalf of someone else's agenda.

Back in March 1988, Powell was National Security Adviser to President Reagan. While images of the massacre shocked, albeit briefly, a Western public jaded by reports of slaughter in the eight-year Iran–Iraq war, the Administration moved quickly to protect its ally Saddam Hussein. Within a week of the attack, US diplomats began publicizing the canard that the Halabjans had died from Iranian chemical weapons, thereafter eliciting a Security Council resolution with no specific condemnation of Iraq that urged both sides to refrain from use of chemical weapons. This gambit was employed throughout the war, and Hiltermann, the Middle East deputy program director at the International Crisis Group, is particularly effective in exposing the utter falsity of the claim. Thus encouraged by the international silence, Saddam was free to expand his program of extermination against large swatches of the Kurdish population in Iraq. Hiltermann's demolition of the "Iranians did it" lie, and his meticulous tracking of the spurious intelligence used to buttress it (later embraced by many on the left in revulsion at Washington's subsequent anti-Saddam tub-thumping), are among the major contributions of the book.

Powell must have recalled these shabby maneuvers, yet during his day at Halabja he unblushingly declared, "At the time, Halabja was commented on by the Administration. And it was commented on both by the White House at that time as well as by the State Department. Strongly condemned. And there was no effort on the part of the Reagan Administration at that time to either ignore it or not take note of it."

Saddam never lacked for partners. He had launched his original ill-fated attack on Iran in September 1980 after garnering an indirect endorsement from Washington via the Saudis. The best the UN Security Council could do in the face of this act of unprovoked aggression was to issue

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a statement appealing to both parties to "desist from all armed activity." Two years later, US official complacency was jarred by the unexpected revival of Iranian military fortunes and consequent Iraqi retreats. As a result, for the rest of the war US policy was geared toward preventing an Iraqi defeat by any means necessary.

Iraq first resorted to chemical weapons in the mountains of the Kurdish north. In July 1983, the Iranians attacked at Haj Omran, a strategic mountain pass in the far northeast of Iraq. In a telling example of the ethnic and political complexities of that part of the world, the attacking force included elements of the Badr Corps, Iraqi Shiite prisoners recruited from POW camps, along with anti-Saddam Kurds from the Kurdistan Democratic Party of Masoud Barzani. Opposing this force were units of other Iraqi Kurds from the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK), headed by Jalal Talabani, who between 1983 and 1984 was allied with Saddam against the Iranians. The attackers were initially successful, until Iraqi planes swooped overhead and dropped bombs. Fighters in the area suddenly smelled garlic and soon afterward developed breathing problems and skin lesions, symptoms that inexorably spread to those lower on the mountain as the gas—sulphur mustard developed during World War I—drifted downhill.

Confident that gas was the answer to Iranian "human wave" attacks, Iraq invested ever more heavily in chemical weapons, developing sophisticated techniques for their employment that were studied with keen attention by Western military staffs. Iran repeatedly protested, imploring the UN to take action, and the Security Council did indeed lament the violation of the 1925 Geneva Protocol, which banned the use of chemical weapons, but tactfully avoided any mention of who was responsible. In Washington, meanwhile, the Administration knew perfectly well, at least by the fall of 1983, who was doing what to whom but was loath to say so. There was, after all, a lot of official outrage and agitation at that time over the alleged use of a biological weapon, the so-called Yellow Rain, by the Communist governments of Laos and Vietnam against their own people. The Secretary of State himself, Alexander Haig, had denounced this as a violation of an international agreement, a position that was for the most part endorsed by the press. Later, a Harvard team conclusively demonstrated that Yellow Rain was in fact bee shit. Was there one law for the Communists and another for Saddam Hussein? The answer was yes. So while issuing occasional pious denunciations of Iraqi chemical use, the United States was at pains to reassure Iraq that there would be no serious consequences. In November 1983, State Department officials expressed their concerns about chemical use to Iraq, but discreetly, so as to "avoid unpleasantly surprising Iraq through public positions we may have to take on this issue." Hypocrisy, as la Rochefoucauld observed, is the homage vice pays to virtue.

To convince the Iraqi leader that we really were his friends, the Administration dispatched the President's Special Middle East Envoy, Donald Rumsfeld, bearing a gift for Saddam from Reagan: a pair of golden spurs. In much of the Middle East, Rumsfeld was an unpopular figure—the US Ambassador in Damascus would leave town, after locking up the liquor cabinet in the residence, whenever he heard the envoy was on his way. But Rummy was popular in Baghdad, where Saddam's men enthused that they regarded him as "a good listener" and "liked him as a person." Rumsfeld did not spoil the party by giving chemical weapons more than a passing mention; instead he spent much of his private time with Saddam trying to sell his host on the idea of an Iraqi oil pipeline to Israel.

The following March, when news of Iraq's revival of poison gas as a weapon finally surfaced in the press, the State Department condemned "the prohibited use of chemical weapons wherever it occurs," while Rumsfeld was sent back to Baghdad to pass the word that the condemnation had been essentially pro forma and that the American desire to improve relations "at a pace of Iraq's choosing remain[s] undiminished." Meanwhile, US diplomats worked to quash discussion of the issue at international forums. No wonder Saddam exulted later that year over what he called "the beautiful atmosphere between us."

The "beautiful atmosphere" soured for a period when it emerged that the United States had been simultaneously selling arms to Iran. So cynically confused had American policy become in this period that in a bloody battle for the Faw Peninsula in February 1986, both sides acted on the basis of intelligence supplied by the United States. But Washington ultimately returned to the embrace of its friend in Baghdad, scrambling to reassure him that the United States could be trusted. Quite apart from the need to curb the ayatollahs, there was money to be made. US companies rushed to sew up lucrative contracts. Even Richard Nixon got in on the act, blessing an enterprise organized by some of his staff to supply uniforms sewn in Romania to the Iraqi army.

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Again and again, Hiltermann stresses that the Iraqis were very conscious of international reaction and probably would have called a halt to the use of gas if there had been a political cost to pay. But there wasn't. He quotes a CIA assessment from late 1986 that laid out the marginal battlefield effectiveness of Iraq's chemical weapons, citing, in his words, "poor tactical employment, lessened element of surprise [and] increased Iranian preparedness." But, the assessment claimed, "because the political costs of continued CW use have been so small, we doubt that Iraq will abandon its use of chemical weapons in the foreseeable future." Although Hiltermann's overall account of the background to Halabja is indispensable, it is his theme of witting US complicity, backed by years of meticulous research, that strikes the most chilling note.

The Iranians were indeed learning how to deal with the Iraq chemicals thanks to protective gear and medical services, but there were other potential victims who would not have these advantages. While the Iraqis had been battling desperately to hold off the Iranians in the south, the Kurds had seized control of much of the countryside in the north. In particular, Jalal Talabani and the PUK had switched sides in 1984 and forged a warm relationship with the Iranians, leading to a highly successful joint raid in October 1986 on Kirkuk, in the heart of Iraq's vital northern oilfield.

This growing threat led Saddam to appoint his vicious cousin Ali Hassan al-Majid as a new viceroy in Kurdistan. There Majid embarked on the classic strategy of "draining the sea" of support for the insurgents by depopulating the countryside. He later pithily summarized his strategy in a meeting with leading officials. "I will kill them all [Kurds] with chemical weapons," he announced in his distinctive high-pitched voice. "Who is going to say anything? The international community? Fuck them…and those who listen to them." Majid's lethal role recently earned him a death sentence from an Iraqi court, but at the time he had no need to worry about the international community and certainly not its most influential member, which by then had joined the war on the Iraqi side. By 1988 the US Navy was in combat against the Iranians in the Persian Gulf, while Secretary of State George Shultz publicly criticized "both Iran and Iraq" for using poison gas.

Planning their traditional spring offensive for 1988, the Iranians, exhausted by the costly battles in southern Iraq, opted to attack in the north, in the area around the border town of Halabja, and with a leading role for Kurdish guerrilla units. As the CIA noted, "By avoiding an assault on a heavily defended strategic target, the regime would be more likely to avoid high casualties in the period leading to the Parliamentary elections" scheduled for April 1988. This is a story in which no one has a monopoly on cynicism. Given the Kurds' experience of Saddam's brutality over the years, they should have been in little doubt as to what would happen if they captured an Iraqi town and handed it over to the Iranians. For whatever reason, the Kurdish commanders went ahead.

The opportunistic offensive was of little benefit to the Iranians, but it was an utter disaster for the Kurds. Kurdish resistance collapsed, largely thanks to what Hiltermann calls "the Halabja demonstration effect." Encouraged by the effective silence of the international community, Saddam and Majid embarked on Operation Anfal, a methodical campaign to exterminate a large percentage of the Kurdish rural population, using gas to send terrified villagers fleeing into the arms of Iraqi units. The men would then be killed, the women and children incarcerated in desert concentration camps. Although the Baghdad press carried regular reports on Anfal (omitting specifics about the extermination part), US officials apparently failed to notice anything untoward happening until the genocide was almost over. It took the resourceful British journalist Gwynne Roberts (unfortunately unmentioned in Hiltermann's book) to make a covert expedition to Kurdistan in October 1988 and bring back contaminated soil samples as conclusive proof that Saddam had been gassing Iraqi citizens.

Halabja was finally liberated from Saddam's control in 1991, when the Iraqis withdrew from much of Kurdistan under US military pressure. The Halabjans could return to their shattered city (it had been looted by the retreating Iranians, then largely demolished by the vengeful Iraqis in 1988). Unnoticed by the uncaring outside world, many of them exhibited horrifying symptoms of the lingering aftereffects of the poison—soaring rates of obscure cancers, miscarriages, birth defects. In 1998, following a perilous journey to the town with a genetic scientist he had brought from England, Roberts reported that not only were the survivors suffering the horrible effects of the gas but so were children born long afterward. Roberts also noted that, partly out of bitter resentment at their neglect by the established Kurdish politicians, the townspeople had fallen under the sway of fundamentalist Islamists.

Victims of one war fomented and supported by the United States, the suffering Halabjans, old and young, were soon unwittingly recruited to play their part in promoting another. George Bush started invoking the gassing of the Kurds in October 2001, and never stopped. Furthermore, in a sinister paradox, the growth of fundamentalism in the area made it possible for the jihadist group Ansar al-Islam to establish control, with some Iranian support, in villages along the nearby border. It was here that Abu Musab al-Zarqawi first established a presence in Iraq, furnishing Colin Powell with some arresting if highly misleading passages on Zarqawi's putative links to the Baghdad regime in Powell's infamous February 2003 UN presentation. He was not alone in purveying such misinformation. *The New Yorker* ran an award-winning 16,000-word piece by Jeffrey Goldberg that artfully wrapped a highly detailed and affecting description of the original Halabja attack and subsequent massacres around a wholly fictitious saga linking Saddam to Al Qaeda via Ansar al-Islam. The shocking truth of the first element was designed to lend verisimilitude to the myth, apparently concocted by Kurdish officials eager to hasten the downfall of Saddam, of the second.

The memorial inaugurated by Powell six months after the invasion was a priority project for Kurdish officials, built, so locals concluded, for the benefit of visiting dignitaries who came to view the exhibit and grieve accordingly. Halabjans, chafing at their neglect by their supposed representatives, were not impressed. On March 16, 2006, the eighteenth anniversary of the attack, they marched to the building and torched it. "Many delegations went to that monument," one of the locals was quoted as saying. "They were paying a visit to the dead people, but neglecting the living." The memorial remains a burned-out shell. Thanks to Islamist resurgence, the town is now dangerous for outsiders to visit. The city of poets has played its part in history and been left with the poison. ■

ON THE WEB: Ari Kelman reviews books about Hurricane Katrina by Douglas Brinkley, Mike Tidwell, Billy Sothern, Chris Rose and others (www.thenation.com).

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My Bondage, My Freedom

CHRISTINE SMALLWOOD

THE ASSISTANT. By Robert Walser. New Directions. 302 pp. $16.95.

For years people thought that the scraps of paper that the Swiss writer Robert Walser left behind at the Herisau mental institution, where he had spent much of his adult life, were covered with a secret code. Only in 1972, sixteen years after his death, were the first writings of what is known as the "pencil area" published. It turned out that the one- to two-millimeter-high letters he had crammed onto cocktail napkins, menus, rejection letters and calendars were an abbreviated German—though one writ very, very small. Walser's penmanship was an apt metaphor: For all the Anglo-American world knew of him, he may as well have been writing in code all along.

Born in Biel, Switzerland, in 1878, Walser was a favorite of Kafka and Musil. But unlike these and other giants of European Modernism, and despite the advocacy of Susan Sontag and translators Christopher Middleton and Susan Bernofsky, he remains little known in America. *The Assistant* (1908), translated by Bernofsky, is the most recent addition to Walser's works in English, which include the novels *Jakob von Gunten* and *The Robber* and the collections *Masquerade*, *Speaking to the Rose* and *Selected Stories*. (Another novel, *The Tanner Family*, will be published next year.) *The Assistant* is a funny, charming novel about the fall of a bourgeois family, the Toblers, and the life of Herr Tobler's assistant, Joseph. Fired for flubbing a calculation at his old job—"just another instance of mental indolence"—and dressed down as an "imposter," Joseph arrives at the Tobler home, which is called the Evening Star, for a fresh start. But it quickly becomes clear that his old friend indolence is still very much with him.

Most of Walser's *oeuvre* is less immediately accessible, consisting largely of *feuilletons* and prose sketches published in the days when newspaper editors were more adventurous. He also wrote enigmatic shorts, long descriptions of walks, bizarre one-page narratives—a man has a pumpkin for a head; a maid loses her charge—summaries of Greek tragedies, opinions, observations, novels and unclassifiable miscellany. Much of Walser's work is punctuated by meandering asides and jarring transitions. He's less of a name here than Kafka or Musil only partly because his work was translated later. The fact is, Walser's stories are opaque, sometimes ethereal, sprinkled with aimless descriptive passages whose humor may only strike you on the second or third read. You have to pay attention.

Walser often wrote in the first person, using narrators who are writers themselves, and though he published cosmopolitan stories inspired by his years hanging about the opera houses and vaudeville theaters of Berlin, his preferred milieu is the small town, village or countryside. Walser is conscious of himself as modern—his story "The Cave Man" (1918) is a witty reflection on the debt owed to our ancestors ("Combs, with which rough and tousled hair can be set in order, did not exist in those days"). But he doesn't take well to city ways or care to rhapsodize over train cars and factory whistles. "And the world, was it changing?" he asks in *The Assistant*. "No.... The face of the earth remained the same. It put on masks and took them off again, it wrinkled and cleared its huge, beautiful brow, it smiled or looked angry, but remained always the same.... Everything in and upon the earth was subject to beautiful, rigorous laws, just like human beings."

Much has been made of Walser's biography: the dashed dreams of being an actor. The brother, a stage designer in Berlin, more adept at navigating the niceties of literary society (and less given to standing on chairs and breaking publishers' phonograph records). The apprentice clerkship at the Bern Cantonal Bank in Biel. The clerkship under the engineer and inventor Carl Dubler (echoed in *The Assistant*). The months as a servant at Schloss Dambrau in Upper Silesia (echoed in *Jakob von Gunten*). He moved around a great deal; between 1921 and 1929 he changed addresses fourteen times, publishing many short pieces in a dozen different German periodicals, a book of prose and two novels. And then there is the madness (echoed in the Robber's "illness"). In 1929 Walser, complaining of

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hearing voices, voluntarily checked in to Waldau Mental Hospital near Bern; in 1933, diagnosed as schizophrenic (wrongly, it is now believed), he was involuntarily transferred to Herisau. On Christmas 1956 he suffered a heart attack while on one of the long walks he loved so much, and was found lying dead in the snow.

It was a fate uncannily like that which he imagined in *The Tanner Family.* But of course, Walser's work does not always so neatly mirror life. While he writes about writers, and about assistants and students, and about poets renting cheap lodging, he also writes about men who talk to wine glasses and monkeys who win the hearts of princesses. His ongoing concern—power and the relations of power between people—grounds what might otherwise seem fanciful or fairy-tale-like. His protagonists are outsiders, outcasts, interlopers—servants, assistants, robbers, job seekers, geniuses fallen on hard times. Guides to the petit-bourgeois world and its manners, petty jealousies, conventions and gossip, they attract the inanity and cruelties of authority and must struggle to define their individuality, even as they welcome the opportunities and security that power provides. For Walser, William Gass has observed, "the power others possess is something that, like a great outcropping of rock, may fall upon you; but it is also a shade under which you may find shelter." Freedom is resisting one's superiors; being in charge a kind of servitude. He often refuses even to commit to his own words, a habit that renders the ordinary fantastic. His characters are given to long speeches, which provides them with plenty of opportunity to contradict themselves. His narrators are most comfortable in a contingent state in which the nature of their very existence is in question.

This is how *The Assistant* begins:

> One morning at eight o'clock a young man stood at the door of a solitary and, it appeared, attractive house.… Before the eyes of this man who, it seemed, had just come from a journey.… He waited a moment longer, as if reflecting on some no doubt irrelevant matter…whereupon a person, a housemaid by all appearances, came to let him in.

He could simply have told us that the house was attractive, the man had come from a journey, he was reflecting on an irrelevant matter and the housemaid answered the door. Instead, he makes this altogether banal moment strange. The effect of this typically Walserian passage

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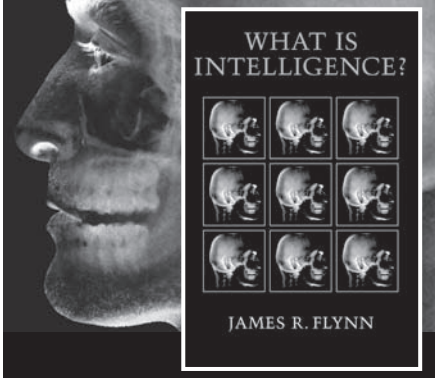

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is not merely to unsettle the narrative and capture the uncertainty the young man is feeling but also to express the distinct sense that things are not as they seem. Or, more terrifying still, that "things," ebbing and flowing on the surface of the unchanging earth, may not be anything at all.

The Assistant is set in Bärenswil, an imaginary village that may be Swiss but is never identified as such. There is an inventor, Herr Tobler, whose "inventions"—a clock with space for advertising; a vending machine that dispenses hunting supplies—are things that no one could possibly want and are obviously doomed to fail. He shouts and hurls things, particularly at Joseph, who was sent by an agency to replace Tobler's former assistant, Wirsich, who was excellent in all ways except for his unfortunate habit of becoming uncontrollably drunk. Joseph is easily distracted, relishes drinking coffee with Frau Tobler and spends hours on gorgeous, bucolic walks to the post office. His favorite part of work is smoking cheroot cigarettes in the shop. Tobler blusters and yells but puts up with Joseph's poor behavior for months. Gradually we begin to wonder: Are we reading about an employer and his assistant, or are they merely playacting? Things may not be what they seem, but everyone strives to pretend they are—so long as they do, they can make believe that catastrophe isn't knocking at the door. And when Frau Tobler threatens the facade by running her mouth off about money troubles—their financial state is indeed dire, though you'd never know it from the cases of wine that continue to be delivered—it is the assistant who will have none of it:

> "Frau Tobler, you are about to get worked up again. Why do you have to think of this all the time? Allow me to remind you that I am your humble servant. But why all these conflicts? I am going to get up from the table now and await your permission to be seated again."
>
> He had risen to his feet. She said he should sit down again. He did as she instructed.

Then they go outside, where Joseph pushes Frau Tobler on a wooden swing.

Joseph, who never once receives the salary from Tobler that he was promised, restores the status quo. He does this not only because doing so guarantees him lodging and all the fried potatoes he can eat but because, like many of Walser's characters, he enjoys being of service. As the eponymous hero of *The Robber* explains, "It filled me with the most delightful gaiety to imagine myself someone's servant."

Walser's young men *choose* to be servants. They cherish the space, freedom from power and anonymity that the habit of submission (and low ambition) provides. It is a nostalgic desire to return to a stable social order of well-defined roles, but the word "role" here is key. In the story "The Job Application," the job seeker Wenzel assures his potential employers that he is "positively drowning in obedience," but what an odd application he sends: "I am a dreamer rather than a thinker, a zero rather than a force, dim rather than sharp. Assuredly there exists in your extensive institution…work of the kind that one can do as in a dream?" (If only!) Joseph is fickle and cheeky: "Am I a beggar or a worker?" he asks Tobler before again becoming "utterly timid." Jakob is a poor student. The Robber talks about serving and then does whatever he pleases, including, scandalously, serving. Obedience for these men is simply playing at obedience. They like the idea of being useful; the comedy results from their obvious inability to do any good. And like Bartleby, another assistant who preferred not to follow orders, this confounds their superiors, forcing them into the game, too.

In *The Assistant*, role-playing ends when friendship is forged—a bond not between a master and servant but between two men of the same class. Joseph leaves Tobler only after befriending the ex-assistant Wirsich. In the presence of one who has fallen even lower than himself, he finds courage. "Now that I have witnessed my comrade's misfortune, I find my heart is able to embrace many things with the most beautiful and peaceful equanimity that in previous months might have caused it agitation. I feel the courage to look deeply, boldy and warmly into the eyes of my future life."

Tobler's response is revelatory: "Get out of this house at once! Go! To my enemies with you! I no longer need you." Finally, he acknowledges his failure and admits the truth. He has no need of an assistant. And Joseph, like a good servant, needs to be of use. Having arrived alone, he walks off into the countryside with Wirsich—he has found someone new to take care of. "How could he have turned his back on an unfortunate like this?"

Walser wrote *The Robber* in 1925, after the Weimar period had thrown Germany into chaos and World War I had ripped apart the Continent. Some of his late writings can be seen in this light. But *The As-*

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sistant dates to 1908. Its refusal of power is not only a reaction against its oppressive consequences but a celebration of rustic pleasures—swimming, boating, walks—and of the companionship that the brute exercise of authority precludes. But pleasure is elusive. Something is always awry, something always prevents Walser's heroes from fully enjoying their idles. "Scarcely has he taken up his pen," Walter Benjamin wrote of Walser, "than he is overwhelmed by a mood of desperation. Everything seems to be on the verge of disaster; a torrent of words pours from him in which the only point of every sentence is to make the reader forget the previous one."

The effect of these self-canceling sentences, these interrupting tangents, is to create a suspended state in which all things are possible and no consequences have crystallized. Even the most serious topics—death, money, love—seem to melt at his touch. In *Jakob von Gunten*, Walser's protagonist runs away from a good home to enroll at a school for servants, the Benjamenta Institute. As time passes, the line between what is happening at the institute (which is only dreamily sketched to begin with) and what is happening inside Jakob's mind dissolves. The novel ends with Fräulein Benjamenta dead and Jakob running off with her brother, the Principal. Whether or not it "really happens" is hardly the point. It *might* happen: "And if I am smashed to pieces and go to ruin, what is being smashed and ruined? A zero. The individual me is only a zero. But now I'll throw away my pen! Away with the life of thought! I'm going with Herr Benjamenta into the desert." Another servant, another zero, another escape.

A Kafka story is tight—every detail is necessary, nothing is extraneous. In Walser, everything is extraneous. There is no center. His writing isn't augmented with digressions; it *is* digression. It doesn't build to an ending because it is always beginning again. There's simply not time for everything. "You've no idea what a pile of things I have to tell you," the narrator of *The Robber* sighs. But "Enough, enough. Already I'm afraid I've bored the reader atrociously. What in the world has become of all those 'fabulous ideas'…?"

Unlike the strong, fleshy characters of Musil or Roth, Walser's people are fragile creatures, liable to fall apart if pressed too hard. There's little to hold on to—just an association, or a name, or a few melancholy thoughts strung together. And Walser makes things more complicated by disappearing completely into stories like "An Immortal" or "There exist drunken geniuses…" The story "Minotaur" begins, "When I'm awake as an author, I pass life by without a glance, sleeping as a man, and perhaps neglect the citizen in me, who would make me give up cigarettes as well as writing if I let him take shape." He jumps to the "problem of nations" before dismissing it, and then decides that "the nation, which is something like a creature that looks to be making all sorts of demands on me, best understands, that is, is most likely to approve of me when I seem to ignore it." He compares this to the Minotaur. "Perhaps one shouldn't, I think, be all too much what one is, too bursting with things one is good at," he muses, before concluding, "If I can consider what has here come into being from knowledge and unconsciousness to be a labyrinth, then the reader, like a Theseus, so to speak, now steps forth." He provokes the reader—he never spites her, he mostly tickles her, and he doesn't wander through labyrinths for their own sake. He has a plan. He wants to be followed.

There is a message, after all, and it too comes from under the shadow of a falling rock. "All of us, couldn't we be a little readier to help and to please each other?" the narrator of "The Cave Man" asks. In the same year, Walser wrote in "Frau Wilke," "Whoever has been poor and lonely himself understands other poor and lonely people all the better. At least we should learn to understand our fellow beings, for we are powerless to stop their misery, their ignominy, their suffering, their weakness, and their death." This burden is shouldered in the quest for freedom of a deeper, collective kind. As he endures Tobler's curses, Joseph thinks "he ought to feel pity for the entire world and also, just a little, for himself—but most intensely and pensively for those around him." In "The Walk," the narrator confides, "What we understand and love understands and loves us also. I was no longer myself, was another, and yet it was on this account that I became properly myself." Perhaps these simple servants, freed from the competitions of modern capitalism, do more than flout the rules of the game. Perhaps their condition gives them a different power: the ability to see each other clearly, intensely, compassionately, fraternally, and only then to see, and at last to know, themselves. All these zeroes together, Walser suggests, may add up to something in the end. ■

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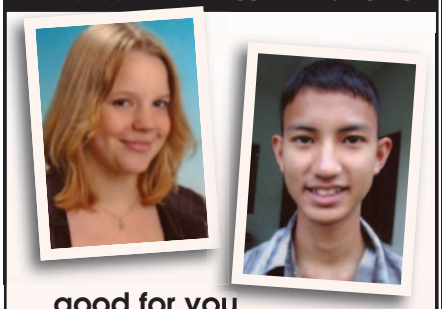

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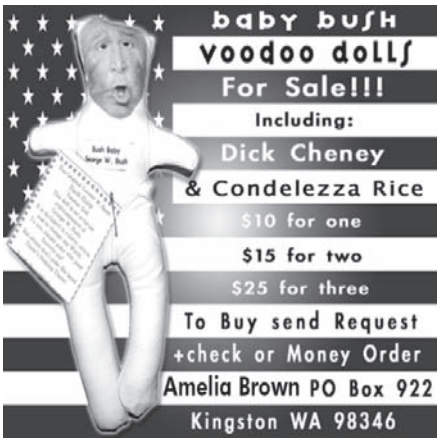

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FILMS

Bywater Blues

STUART KLAWANS

KAMP KATRINA • THE MONASTERY • EXILED

Spike Lee was right to call his film a "requiem." His four-part HBO documentary *When the Levees Broke* brought together a large and mournful chorus to lament the abandonment of New Orleans, from the warnings about Hurricane Katrina that were neglected early on to the dispersal of residents in the storm's aftermath. To learn about a later stage in the catastrophe, you can turn to Jonathan Demme's *Right to Return* project, which he rightly and resonantly describes as being made up of "home movies." These portraits of people in the Lower Ninth Ward—excerpts of which were broadcast in May on Tavis Smiley's PBS show—unaffectedly bring to life Katrina survivors who have refused to go into exile and are now trying to rebuild their neighborhood and city.

What we get from Ashley Sabin and David Redmon is more difficult to say. Unlike Lee and Demme, they have given no tag to their documentary *Kamp Katrina*—no hint about the kind of work they think they've made or the spirit in which we might receive it. So, on my own initiative, I will call it an urban platoon movie. Its setting, in the Bywater section of New Orleans, looks like a combat zone. Its characters, who are numerous at first and varied, get picked off by ones and twos until only a couple are left. You settle in with these people and become immersed in the chaos, brutality and surreal humor of their situation, seen close-up and often in fragments. This isn't the heartening experience of Demme's film, nor is it a comprehensive picture like Lee's—but it seems appropriate enough to a war of attrition.

I say you settle in with the characters because that's just what the filmmakers did. Before Katrina hit, Sabin and Redmon had been working intermittently on a sketch of a Bywater resident called Ms. Pearl, who had figured in Redmon's documentary *Mardi Gras: Made in China*. A wiry, middle-aged woman with pigtails and Native American features, as hip in manner as Lord Buckley and as colorful as a Mardi Gras krewe, Ms. Pearl had formed a bond with Sabin and Redmon, one that was close enough for her to phone them after Katrina and explain her new circumstances. So the filmmakers rejoined her and were present, one month after the hurricane, when she visited some volunteers in Washington Square Park and spontaneously offered to house displaced persons in her backyard, which in better days had served as a community garden: "I got a shower and everything back there, with hot and cold running water—hot and cold, baby."

Fourteen homeless people signed up and were put into tents, with Sabin and Redmon as residents fifteen and sixteen. For the next six months, Redmon has told me, the filmmakers lived practically full-time in Kamp Katrina, sometimes sleeping in the tents and sometimes in the house that Ms. Pearl shares with her husband, David Cross. "Neither of us," Redmon says, "would ever want to do it again."

And yet there seems to have been a bustle of optimism in the tent village during its first days. People invented addresses for their new residences ("1313 Dave's Yard"), enjoyed communal meals and gratefully signed on as laborers with their hosts' construction company. Ms. Pearl and Cross offered more than a canvas shelter. They provided something to do: a paying job repairing houses wrecked by the hurricane.

Not everyone picked up a hammer. A fellow called Charles devoted himself instead to cleaning the yard and issuing prophecies: "I am at Ground Zero of the Apocalypse, with Joan of Arc as my girlfriend. You don't think that havin' an invisible girlfriend gets on my nerves?" Ms. Pearl, believing that helpless, God-infatuated people must be blessed, considered herself to be Charles's protector. She also took on the task of protecting Kelley, a young woman who was about a month pregnant when she moved into Kamp Katrina. Whenever Kelley had trouble, Ms. Pearl would unfailingly swoop in with sisterly fierceness—and this was remarkable,

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because Kelley and her husband were crackheads.

So were other residents of Ms. Pearl's backyard. In time, she also found she was housing drunks, thieves, layabouts, wife beaters and men who would invite themselves into her house unannounced to take a shower, or whatever. The rules of Kamp Katrina were simple but fair: No hard drugs, no fighting, no invasion of privacy. Somehow, a significant number of residents could not live within these limits and had to be told to leave, usually by Cross, who is a forceful man despite having a plate of food perpetually attached to his hands.

If a film about the effects of Hurricane Katrina ought to disturb viewers, then Sabin and Redmon have done the job twice, documenting the victimization of people who were likely enough to victimize themselves, along with anyone else in the vicinity. This choice of subject may cause discomfort among moviegoers who want only the upright and worthy to suffer, and always from afflictions imposed from above. (Such audiences would have squirmed even more if *Kamp Katrina*'s characters hadn't been predominantly white.) But Ms. Pearl and Cross didn't squirm. Their guests' behavior pissed them off, but I see no evidence of surprise.

With similar worldliness, Sabin and Redmon refrain from commenting on the jackasseries they recorded, other than to insert a brief text noting that every lawful diversion in Bywater had been shut down, except for a convenience store and a liquor store. Meanwhile, as we see, the crack merchants across the street from Ms. Pearl's house were open for business. Speaking with the ardor of a convert—like her husband, she is a recovering addict—Ms. Pearl warned her guests away from these dealers. For the camera, she also pointed out the bullet holes in her house, explaining that the drug sellers had not been happy when she and Cross moved in, intruding into their marketplace. It took time, she says, for decent people to re-establish themselves on these blocks.

Kamp Katrina shows the consequences for decent people—as many of them as remained—when these same blocks were left ruined and stinking of death. More to the point: It shows what happened to wayward people, such as those camping out in the yard, when nothing was left to straighten them out. Ms. Pearl and Cross alone, however admirable and street-smart, were not enough—which is why they sent the screw-ups packing without apology, all except for Kelley.

As the film records the dreadful last section of her story, you may notice an unexpected artfulness in *Kamp Katrina*. Though obviously shot on digital video, on a budget equal to whatever Sabin and Redmon were carrying in their pockets, these scenes (and others) use cutaways among multiple camera setups, giving the action a movielike smoothness. Very often, documentarians achieve this effect only by staging scenes or combining shots that were taken at different times—tricks that are widely thought to be dubious, even though they've been used since *Nanook of the North*. According to Redmon, though, "Asking people to do or repeat scenes of horror is where we draw the ethical line." The reason he and Sabin seem to have been everywhere, he says, is that each operated a camera, with two others sometimes joining in. Thanks to hard work and nimbleness on location, plus cleverness in the editing room, *Kamp Katrina* provides you with excellent views of the last of its platoon going to her special hell.

You're left with the question that hangs over all platoon movies: Was the battle worth the pain? Only Ms. Pearl can answer; and she seems to have no regrets for having tried to help Kelley and the rest. You look at her tough, drawn face and realize she knew what she was getting into. You listen to her final words and know why she made the effort. She scans the wreckage of her neighborhood, bullet holes and all, and says, "You wouldn't believe how beautiful this used to be."

After a special screening at the Museum of Modern Art on August 23, *Kamp Katrina* will run in New York at the Two Boots Pioneer Theater, August 24–September 4.

Of all the odd tasks people have undertaken in the movies—from setting the speed record for visiting the Louvre to building an opera house in the Amazon jungle—none is stranger than Jørgen Vig's project in *The Monastery*. An octogenarian bachelor, long retired from a career as a university librarian and priest, Vig has installed himself in a crumbling, leaky, unheated castle that he bought cheap many years ago in Hesbjerg, far out in the Danish countryside. Now, he thinks, maybe he'll hand this property to the Moscow Patriarchate so his castle can become the first Russian Orthodox monastery on Danish soil.

It's all true. Directed and photographed by Pernille Rose Grønkjær, *The Monastery* is a sly, quiet documentary about Vig's scheme and how it changes him, once the Patriarchate sends Sister Ambrosija as the head of a small delegation to live in his castle. Did Vig offer the property just to have such companionship? If so, he'd never admit it. Thin, stooped and toothless, with his face entirely circled by a wispy mane of white hair and his oversize eyeglasses propped far down his nose, Vig claims never to have felt love, or to have wanted to feel it. "I suppose I'm deformed in some way," he says, with the frankness of a curmudgeon for whom all questions are settled. But you can sense his excitement as he cleans up in anticipation of the nuns' arrival. (He does all the work himself.) And you see how respect, curiosity, gallantry and resentment mingle in him when the much younger Sister Ambrosija walks in and starts giving orders. She is taking charge of two wrecks: the building and Vig.

WORDS

Words charm me
    make me sign
And ask that I
    work
at any salary
    to find them—
Words rush
    under my pen
like a crowd
    of workers
Words demand
    their right to speak
    and seek to establish a dictatorship
    of words over life—
They need someone who understands them
    who will be at their service—
            Alas! I am not that person
Words pass through my hands
    Sitting and sleeping
    at the feet of the poet
    Who alone knows what they are worth
    Words will die if no one
    stirs them in time—
Words are silence which speaks—
Silent speaking bubbles.

Sony Labou Tansi
(translated from the French by Kristen Prevallet)

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With its perilous castle in the forest, its creaky old wizard and intrepid heroine from a far-off land, *The Monastery* has been likened to a fairy tale. Grønkjær herself has made the comparison—but she's had the wisdom to let those in the audience enter the enchantment gradually, in their own time. A popular selection on the festival circuit, *The Monastery* begins a US theatrical run on August 29, at Film Forum in New York.

And now for some cinema: The camera gazes down as if from a second-story window, where an anxious woman waits with her baby. Then, without interruption, it floats to street level and skims along the deserted road, to the place where four dangerous strangers have gathered. We see dark glasses, spiked hair, a leather jacket, a raincoat like a cowboy's duster. A cigar falls in slow motion from one man's fingers. Curtains billow in the wind. With grim deliberation, two of the killers push open the street door and mount the stairs.

This is just the first three minutes' worth of Johnnie To's explosive, outrageous *Exiled*. A yarn about gangland camaraderie, turf wars, recent Chinese history and a hell of a lot of gold—the usual stuff—*Exiled* gives you To in knockabout mode, compared with his more brooding films, such as *Triad Election*. That's all right. If you're looking for a real movie, knock here. ■

EVENTS

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■ Thursday, September 6, 6:30 PM. Featuring *Nation* editor and publisher Katrina vanden Heuvel, Stephen F. Cohen and Julia Fox. Moderated by Mike Conway. Sponsored by the Indiana University School of Journalism and *The Nation*. Ernie Pyle Hall, 940 East 7th Street. University of Indiana, Bloomington. Free! For questions, please e-mail iuevents@thenation.com.

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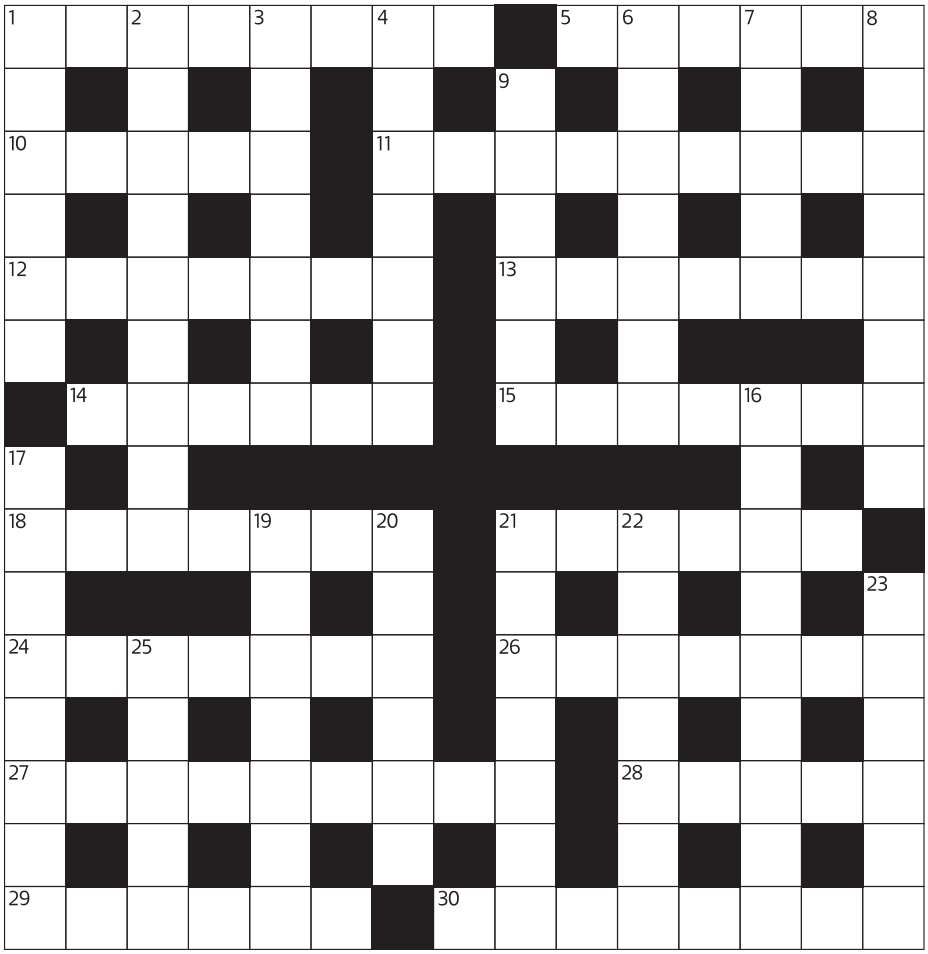

ACROSS

1 and **5** The way some people vote is rather honest, with a check mark—and in Paris, too! (8,6)

10 Do you take the bone wagon to get such an award? (5)

11 Suggests a car city other than Detroit, where you might have to face the music. (9)

12 Samson was supposedly at one time the head of Eden with the old version having not so much to finish. (7)

13 In the know, with the outhouse to finish it. (5,2)

14 Sharpness. (6)

15 Both "Red" and dead, and didn't want to find the answer. (7)

18 What tyranny was made to do by Columbia. (7)

21 Hale and hearty—however what one may take in the morning is in deterioration. (6)

24 One who takes deep risks might be helpful when there's some stoppage. (7)

26 Norma perhaps might be wool-gathering, in a sense. (7)

27 Kept from doing what you want to? (9)

28 A louse, and in Paris, too—or at West Point. (5)

29 Most of Al, the politician, and not quite gone, like one with rather snaky hair. (6)

30 Proving the times can change—relating to the study of meaning. (8)

DOWN

1 See 17

2 Certainly not good cheer, when it's rather expensive in Paris inside it, which proves overrefined. (9)

3 Perhaps one in Jerusalem is real shook up with one! (7)

4 Sometimes said to be the best policy in the plant? (Sharpen the pen!) (7)

6 You might have one if you want the goods delivered, but the singer hopes to be good this way. (7)

7 The old song asked if anyone had noticed this guy. (5)

8 They might be helpful to the mountain climber, but they could be used to illustrate "This Little Piggy"! (8)

9 A fresh-water crawler, but I thus get a bunch of whales! (6)

16 The record has a color with it, so give it no mind! (9)

17 and **1** Set foot with a quick sharp sound, a little way on a person's method of getting across the stream. (8,6)

19 That glitch in the program deserves a Bronx cheer, which is something that really bothers you. (7)

20 Take a supposedly human action at a proper conclusion for the list of wrongs. (6)

21 You could get a rise out of the first part, with the conclusion being ready for payment, like the remainder. (7)

22 Rock fragments in an acerbic heap. (7)

23 A car wreck naturally leads to a rather shaky conclusion, leaving you out in the cold. (6)

25 A leading man in the theater? (5)

SOLUTION TO PUZZLE NO. 3093

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P	■	T	■	I	■	E	■	A	■	E	■	A	■	I
S	T	E	N	C	I	L	■	T	O	N	I	G	H	T
E	■	W	■	H	■	E	■	E	■	L	■	R	■	C
■	M	A	L	I	N	G	E	R	■	A	W	A	S	H
J	■	R	■	■	■	R	■	■	■	R	■	N	■	C
U	L	T	R	A	■	A	L	L	I	G	A	T	O	R
D	■	■	■	G	■	P	■	I	■	E	■	■	■	A
G	R	O	U	N	D	H	O	G	■	S	E	R	I	F
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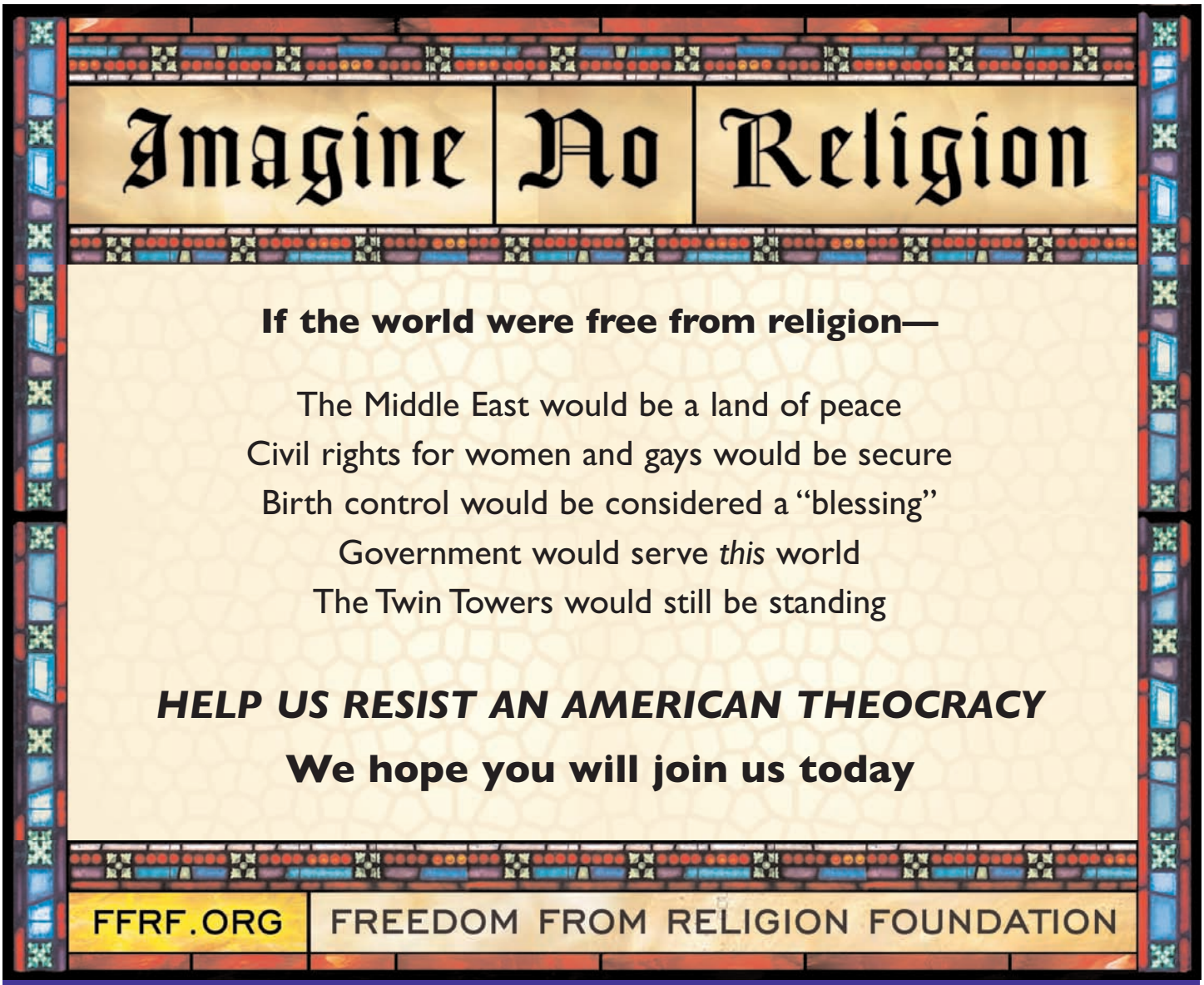
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